

“Jump!”

Aggression, dance and gender roles – a reading of mosh pit culture



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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

It's somewhere around 11 o'clock in San Francisco on a Friday night, and I'm drunk to the point of forgetting my own name. I'm in a venue called Pound SF, located by one of the piers a good way south of downtown. In other words, I'm in the middle of nowhere and I have no idea how I'm going to get back to the youth hostel I'm staying at but at the moment I'm far from caring. The venue is a small room which I'm guessing doesn't take hold many more than 100, the ceiling is low and the general feel of the place is relatively trashy, and I feel completely comfortable. The band on stage is a metal band called Hostility: along with the other bands that are playing tonight, they are local heroes and the audience is composed of their friends, their fans and random strangers like myself. On my way from the bar with yet another strongly-mixed vodka coke I halt for a second and stare at the small but enthusiastic crowd in front of me. Seemingly out of nowhere an open circle has formed in front of the stage and the most eager young men are engaged in the smallest but most intense pit I have ever seen. They are running around like athletes, pushing each other around, the grins on their faces a clear indication of how much fun they are having. The boys are playing and I feel the need for some real action growing in my heart, remembering the thrill of being in the crowd and being knocked around, pushing my own limits. Making my way back to the girls I have just befriended I accidentally stumble into the pit and before I know what's happened I'm lying on top of my drink on the floor, which thankfully had been served in a plastic cup. Before I've even managed to understand that I've been knocked over two arms grab me and pull me back on my feet as easily as if I were a rag doll, and send me on my way. Both my knees are scraped and my t-shirt is soaked because of the wasted drink I barely even got to taste, and I laugh as I lift both arms high up in the air towards the band on stage, metal sign formed with both hands. Then I throw myself into the music with the rest of the girls at the side of the stage and scream as I dance. It's my first concert in America and in that second I can't remember the last time I felt so alive. I turn and face the pit instead of the band, feeding off the energy of the crowd. It's getting intense in there, and I curse myself for drinking too

much. I want to be in there with them. I know what it feels like. This is a world I know well. This is the pit.

Since the first time I saw a mosh pit they have fascinated me. My first personal experience came quite late compared to most: I was 20 years old and the band was punk pop heroes Ash from Northern Ireland, who were performing in front of a small but dedicated crowd at Rockefeller, Oslo in 1998. The pit wasn't what you could describe as excessively violent, but I got knocked into enough that night that I could barely move when I woke up the next day, and I was badly bruised. The pain was so excruciating that my father eventually drove me to the emergency room where it was confirmed that I had not broken any ribs, and the pain was



merely due to sore muscles. To my surprise I felt a tad disappointed by the trivial nature of my pain; for reasons I could not put my finger on, I had hoped to be able to boast of having broken a rib in the pit. Ever since that first night I have loved the rush of being in the pit, of letting the music take full control of me, so much so that jumping up and down like a

madwoman, being crushed by the crowd and ending up with legs full of bruises and marks seems like a perfectly reasonable thing to do. It is adrenaline, it is love, it's a natural high, and I loved every second of it, not considering for a moment that what I was doing could potentially be dangerous.

Not long after that, it all went horribly wrong. In 2000 nine young men died as a result of being trampled in the pit in front of Pearl Jam at the Roskilde festival in Denmark, a festival where a number of my friends were among the paying public. It wasn't the first time someone had died in the pit, but nothing quite as serious as this had ever happened so close to my own world before. I spent the next three days waiting for my friends to come home, not knowing even the nationality of the people who had passed away, hoping that the people

who I cared about weren't among the dead.¹ During that time I spent hours in front of my computer going through the online newspapers frantically searching for news, and ended up following discussions on crowd behaviour and safety at festivals and concerts. This, combined with my own experiences in the pit before and after this incident, sparked my strong interest in the subject matter, which has resulted in the work contained in the pages that follow.

As a fan and also as a performer of rock music it was difficult for me at the time to understand why what to me appeared to be a natural part of any rock concert could lead to such disastrous results. But as a student of musicology I ended up viewing my behaviour and that of my fellow fans with a more critical approach as time passed, starting to ask the question of *why* we behave this way when we're enjoying music. What is the appeal, what reasoning lies behind the urge to put oneself in a potentially dangerous situation, and through doing so allegedly enjoy the concert experience more strongly? Questions like these are what have led me to research this subject. I have previously done related work of a more superficial character in 2001, work which prompted more questions, and led me to feel like the subject matter needed to be researched more thoroughly.

I see moshing as a vital part of music experience in the rock domain, a form of expression, connection and the forming of personal and group identity. This act has been going on every night in venues since the early days of punk. The build of a concert and the build of the intensity in the pit are in ways dependent on each other, and any young man or woman who is more than a casual concert goer knows what the pit is, what it means, what it is for, and that it is expected; it is the area of a rock concert where the fans connect to each other and the music most easily. However, while it is more easily recognised within the rock frame of mind, the mosh pit is also recognised as a part of popular culture through rock videos on MTV, commercials in which it is used humorously, and most recently in the last scene of the animated motion picture *Shrek 2*. In this film, released in 2004, the main character stagedives into the crowd of cartoon characters in the musical finale.

¹ No Norwegians died at Roskilde, but the nationalities of the deceased weren't released until days after the fact.

The significance of rock from a cultural point of view is that its significance is not only found in its music, it is also contained in the event of the live performance and the surrounding excitement. As rock musicians are notably concerned with the *show*, with their presentation and their image, so are their fans. In the rock realm “what you see is what you get” is not just a catchphrase: image is everything, and the pit is part of forming that image, something I hope to be able to explore thoroughly within these pages.

Because I am a rock fan, I had to position myself somewhere in between an academic perspective and a rock fan’s viewpoint. This was necessary in order for me to be able to combine the insider information I have from years of attending rock concerts, along with attempting to take a step back and view the behaviours of my peers and myself with more critical eyes. That said, my understanding of the pit within the rock environment is mostly from a bystander’s point of view, more frequently observing the behaviour rather than partaking in it.

1.2. Central questions and theoretical background

At first glance, it might seem that the spectacle of the mosh pit appears completely devoid of any reason or logic. However, regardless of how much one might be tempted to dismiss the chaos one is a witness of as mere juvenile acts of violence, the pit is a world with rigid rules and regulations. I will try my best to attempt to shed light as to the reasons underlying the behaviour within these pages. This work, and the sources cited, will be of an interdisciplinary character. As Shelia Whiteley writes in the introduction to *Sexing the Groove*:

Popular musicologists acknowledge the need to situate the analysis of the musical text within the context of an active, interdisciplinary field for the purpose of achieving a more holistic enquiry into the musical sound. In particular, it is recognised that a flexible and adjustable critique can cater for the wide range of discourses and sets of references that are analogous to styles. (Whiteley, 1997: xvi)

Seeing as the subject matter has not been extensively researched at the present time, I will combine relevant texts with ethnographic research of my own. I will use in-depth interviews

and participant observation as the main forms of examination, along with data collection in the form of a survey, using the Internet as a communication tool in order to reach a more diverse group of fans. Combining academic texts, and giving the moshers themselves as strong a voice as possible, I hope to reach a better understanding of what reasons and motivations lie behind the behaviour witnessed.

Within the musicological domain I place myself in the tradition of what has been known as New Musicology, and I am indebted in particular to the work of Susan McClary, whose book *Feminine Endings* (1991) presents a frame of mind towards the understanding of meaning in music to which I especially relate. In the introduction she writes:

(...) I began my career with the desire to understand music. (...) Yet what I desired to understand about music has always been quite different from what I have been able to find out in the authorized accounts transmitted in classrooms, textbooks, or musicological research. I was drawn to music because it is the most compelling cultural form I know. I wanted evidence that the overwhelming responses I experience with music are not just in my own head, but rather are shared. (McClary, 1991: 4)

The quoted passage fits my frame of mind over the years in studying music. My own connection with music, through performing and being a fan, has always been filled with passion and intensity, and in the beginning stages of my education I struggled with how the subject I was studying often appeared to be far from my own experiences and understanding of what music is. McClary writes about overwhelming responses to music, and the apparent rebellious chaos of the mosh pit is to me a very good example of this. It is a way of relating to music which is an important part of the live experience for many fans, however rarely discussed in detail or dismissed as inconsequential, even by those who partake in it.²

The first question that springs to mind while watching a mosh pit is simply this: what draws the fans to the pit, to react to music in a violent manner? In simpler terms: why do people mosh? Why do they willingly go into a crowd among whom they are more likely to get hurt than watch a band perform quietly? Seeing as the average moshers commonly is a young male, it is tempting to dismiss the scene as an overflow of juvenile aggression, which by all

² A number of potential sources chose not to take part in my study for this reason.

means is part of the motivation. However it is in no way sufficient to explain why jumping off a stage into a crowd of people is considered a socially acceptable way of showing one's appreciation of music in the world of rock.

My positioning must be placed, as previously stated, somewhere in between that of the moshers, and that of an academic with no mosh experience. Along with this I am influenced by several factors, which I attempt to illustrate with figure 1.

As the figure shows, my understanding of moshing is influenced from two different directions. On one side, it is from an experiential point of view, in how I've seen pits in media through music videos, concert recordings and films, how I've experienced the pits at concerts where I have been the performer, and my own pit experiences through years of seeing live performances of bands in different genres. Together, these two separate backgrounds influence my understanding of moshing, and I will draw from both sides in order to construct my reading of the pit. From the theoretical perspective, my education in musicology is supported by works from ethnography, psychology, sociology and subculture studies.

As Richard Middleton states in *Studying popular music*:

A musicologist stands, inescapably, in the midst of all this, drawn to the 'cultivated' side by his training, to the 'popular' side by his subject-matter. Rather than pulling to one side, with the traditional musicologists, or the other, with the 'total critics' of musicology, it will be better to *look both ways, living out the tension*. Given the 'fractured unity' of the musical field, that is the way to a faithful reflection in one's method of the reality of the practice and the discourse. (Middleton, 1990: 123)

There are different ways to approach the question of violent behaviour in the rock audience, and I will attempt to address a number of them, a key point being reacting to music with the body. Can moshing be seen as a form of dance? My impression is that this might be the case, and I will present an argument supporting this in part 6. In aid of this argument, I will draw parallels between the worlds of the moshpit and the rave culture, reaching a better understanding of what moshing is through these comparisons. With this approach through dance and movement theory, I hope to make a convincing argument to the point that moshing

is more complex than merely being an expression of youthful aggression and/or rebellion. Rather it is a different way of expressing joy and positive emotions for the audience, in a form more fitting to the music which is being played.

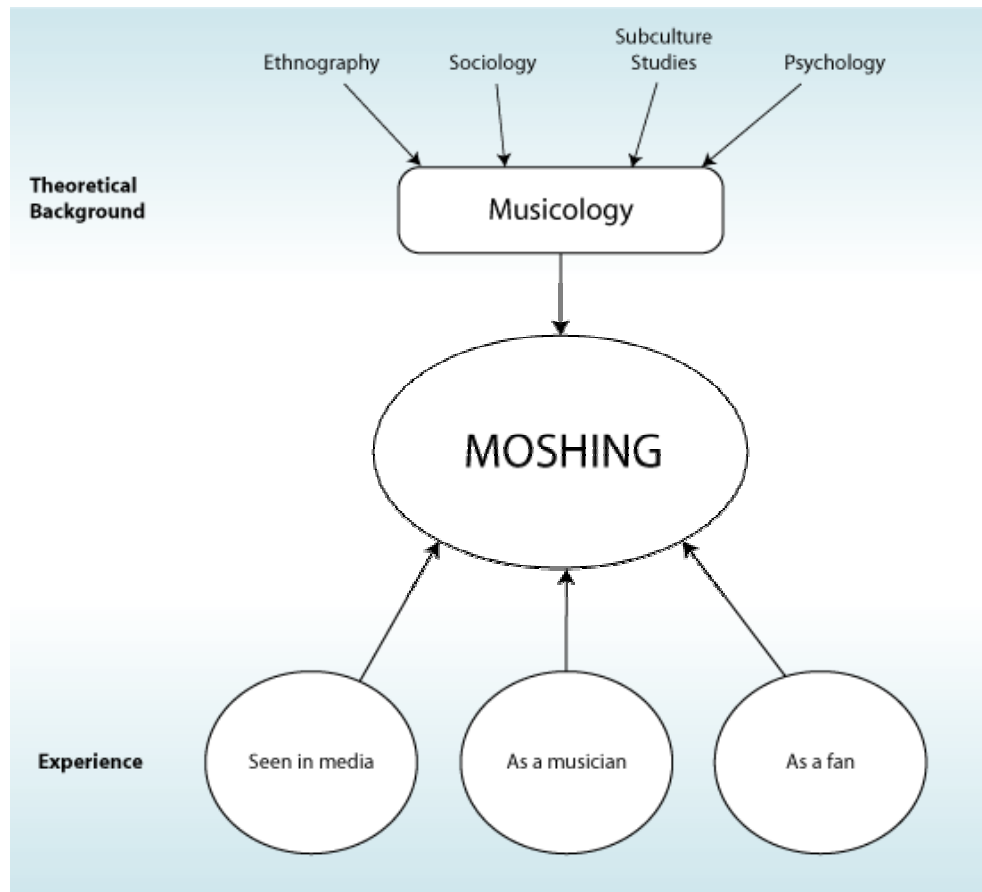


Figure 1. "Model for theorizing moshing"

As a way of collecting data, I have used an ethnographic model of research. Ethnography is not a particular method of data collection but a style of research that is distinguished by its objectives, which are to understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given 'field' or setting, and an approach, which involves close association with, and often participation in, this setting. To access social meanings, observe behaviour and work closely with informants several methods of data collection are relevant, such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, the use of personal documents and discourse analyses of natural language. (Brewer, 2000: 27)

I have used several of these methods, participant observation at a large number of concerts over the past years and in-depth interviews being the most predominant. I also sometimes

found research subjects by accident when falling into discussions with strangers, who offered their opinions and anecdotes from the pit when they learned about my research.

As mosh is a relatively widespread phenomenon, it is not sufficient only to look to the local music scene for my research. This is especially true as moshing is not as commonly seen in Oslo venues as it is abroad, and the local pits are understood as being less intense than the ones seen abroad. This is because Norwegian crowds are frequently judged to be reserved in comparison to crowds in other countries. To do research only based in Norway would not give an accurate impression of the subject matter, as moshing is executed in variations that are as numerous as there are venues. To broaden the scope I have been in touch with moshers from all over the world with the help of the Internet, interviewing rock fans using email and chat programmes like AOL Instant Messenger, collecting data via surveys and monitoring online discussion forums dedicated to moshing. The vast majority of the fans I have been in contact with via the Internet hail from United Kingdom or USA.



Moshing can be seen as a tool in the shaping of identity, both individually and collectively in the rock environment. The pit is understood as a vital part of the experience of a rock concert by bands and fans alike, creating a collective experience with a feeling of connectedness among the participants. Identity is discussed by Grotevant and Cooper in *Individuality and Connectedness*:

Identity has traditionally referred to one's sense of coherence of personality and continuity over time; it is the meshing of personality with historical and situational context. Thus, the construct of identity stands at the interface of individual personality, social relationships, and external context, and has major implications for optimal adolescent development. Development of identity is a life-long process, characterized by cycles of exploration and consolidation as well as experiences of competence and vulnerability. (Grotevant and Cooper, 1998: 6)

The relationship between an individual and the arena in which moshing occurs, is an example of a social relationship, and moshing in itself can be seen as a part of exploring oneself with others.

When discussing identity the question of gender also comes strongly into play, most notably in constructing the personal identity of the male rocker. The pit as it is constructed is easily understood as a strong masculine bonding session with some sexual undertones. The initial desire to enter the pit stems from an urge to release the tension provoked in one's own body by the intensity of the music and performance of the band, and the venture into the pit is the culmination and release of this tension in interaction with peers. This notion brings to mind that of a mass masturbation, every male in the room exploding at once at the height of a song. Moshing is highly concerned with the construction of rebellion in movement, with an exceedingly strong desire to appear as being of a rebellious nature. This is regardless of any cause for actual rebellion in relation to a cause being present. This is especially true with the punk rock audiences. The sense of a male bonding session is not one to dismiss, and as such the pit can feel excluding to women.

The relation of reciprocity established between men, however, is the condition of a relation of radical nonreciprocity between men and women and a relation, as it were, of nonrelation between women. (Butler, 1990: 53)

As a rule, the pit has been seen as a playground for the young male, a place seen as too dangerous for females to venture into without the protection of a male companion. This is particularly important to examine in light of developments seen in the recent years, when a larger number of females have been entering the rock world and making it their own, both as fans and musicians. Women are there no longer just as groupies or girlfriends, but as a strong feminine element that refuses to accept the gender roles presented to them by earlier generations of fans.

Gender conformity is pressed onto all girls, not just tomboys, and this is where it becomes hard to uphold the notion that male femininity presents a greater threat to social and familial stability than female masculinity. If adolescence for boys represents a rite of passage (...) and an ascension to some version (however attenuated) of social power, for girls, adolescence is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression. (Halberstam, 1998: 6)

The females in the pit are challenging this gender conformity when partaking in pit behaviour, creating their own sense of meaning in this aggressive environment. I will show examples of this.

This paper will begin first with exploring what a mosh pit is in descriptive terms, before moving onto the music and how a pit and the band interact through music and a performance's intensity levels. I will then continue with the ethnographic results of my attempt to pinpoint how the moshers themselves understand moshing, before going into the theoretical discussions of mosh and dance, ending with identity and gender.

2. Contextualising the pit

Before one can ask what the mosh pit is, one must first attempt to understand where it is located. What does it look like, how is it placed, and who exactly is the person we call a moshers? *Moshing* is defined, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary³ as “to engage in uninhibited often frenzied activities (as intentional collision) with others near the stage at a rock concert.” It is, in other words, rhythmic body movement that takes place in front of the stage at rock concerts, and is in its simplest mode merely a form of dancing. An early form of what we now call moshing took place at punk clubs and concerts, where people would throw themselves into each other on the dance floor. This was referred to as slam dancing, a label that is less frequently used today. Another term used is pogoing, which is essentially the same as slam dancing, and the term most commonly used in Norwegian to describe similar kinds of behaviour. I generally use a wider definition of moshing, which is here to be understood as *activities of bodily movement that may occur in the pit in front of the stage at concerts where rougher variants of popular music is performed*, as this definition would cover all the different forms of pit behaviour seen in the punk, rock and metal scenes, without necessarily being understood as moshing by the participants. The term does, however, not cover pits from other genres, as this author believes that moshing is an alternative to dance in the alternative music world, and would not describe the behaviour of pop or hip hop fans as moshing, no matter how much they knock into each other.

For all concerts that have a standing area in front of the stage, this area is referred to as the pit, however the code of conduct - as applied by the actors - varies. Different types of music will not have the same types of pits: although a pit seen in front of the stage at a Britney Spears concert may be a very dangerous place to be, it will not be a pit of the same mentality and aggression as one in front of, for example, Marilyn Manson.⁴ The way the bands on the

³ All definitions from Merriam-Webster in these pages come from their online site.

⁴ Arena concerts have a quite different nature from ones at smaller venues, due to the vastness of the audience. To have an advanced form of moshing is impossible, as the fans are completely crushed together in the pit, regardless of the form of music. Thus it makes the pop and metal audience quite similar at first glance – like sardines in tins they jump around. However, the Britney fans would never start crowdsurfing: it would not occur to them to do so, as the main focus at such a show is to try to see the person on stage rather than feel the rush of the pit. The same kind of mentality is found within the metal fans too without a doubt. However at metal

stage play up to the pit also affects how the events unfold down at the front of the stage. Although I do not limit moshing to something that occurs only in the rock environment, it is within that world my research in these pages predominantly takes place, due to the more violent nature of the pit at rock concerts. It is just as easy to get injured in the pit of a pop concert, but the reasons for being in the pit in the first place differ somewhat between the fan that wants to see Westlife and the fan out to see Metallica. There is in both worlds a desire to get closer to the artist on stage, but I do believe that for a good number of fans in rock world being in the pit is an end in itself: it is not only a means to get to the stage, as generally would be the case for the Westlife fans, who are wanting to get close to their idols. The pit is a place to soak up the atmosphere of a concert and interact with peers – be it the band or the other fans.

Moshing generally begins with members of the crowd bobbing their heads up and down in time to the music, dancing and/or jumping on the spot. At metal concerts you will also usually see a fair amount of headbanging, which is throwing your head up and down in a bigger movement reflecting the rhythm and speed of the drums (this is especially entertaining to watch when carried out by people with long hair, the hair flying up and down in time to the music). The action will grow more intense if the crowd is larger or merely in that way inclined. It doesn't take a large number of people to start a mosh pit, but the bigger the pit is, the more eventful and possibly dangerous it can become. Also, the more intensely a concert is experienced by the people in the crowd, the more the possibility of real violence increases. If the band on stage encourages the crowd to let go of their inhibitions and go crazy to the music, the fans will be even more inclined to do so. The pit is a small but tightly constrained area, people are packed in next to each other with little or no personal space and it can be difficult to breathe normally at times. This is especially the case in pits at stadium concerts.

Sometimes one will witness crowdsurfing, which is accomplished by having others around you lift you up and push you over the crowd (you step onto someone's open hands and that person will push you up, forcing you to land in the crowd, your back down and head facing

concerts, a larger number of people will be drawn to the pit - not only in order to see the band more closely but also to get the rush of the pit experience, as shared with other fans.

up). The crowd will then carry you, and you end up “surfing” over the pit as it were, hence the name. The term surfing applied here may give the impression that one is standing up - in a similar manner to what one would on a surf board - when crowd surfing which is not the case. A more accurate name would probably be crowd rolling, as you are almost rolling from body to body, although you are usually on your back being pushed from person to person. It’s the crowd that controls the direction in which you move, which typically is towards the stage. One of the more common ways to get mild injuries in a mosh pit through crowdsurfing; it is not unusual to get someone’s boot in your face when they are suddenly thrust one’s way, and it can be difficult to get out of the way quickly enough.

Crowdsurfing can be a disturbing experience for a female moshers, it is not uncommon to hear girls complain of being groped or even undressed by men in the pit, which understandably is something they do not appreciate. To be groped in the pit can be a traumatic experience for a young girl, and is one of the reasons why a large number of



girls in the rock scene refrain from entering the pit, fearing for their own safety. There have even been media reports of girls being raped in the pit.⁵ It should be noted that rapes in the pit are exceedingly rare. The majority of boys in the pit take a stand against this and other sorts of disrespectful behaviour from fellow males in the pit, and some take it upon themselves to look after the girls and will react if they see guys behaving poorly towards the girls in the pit. It is also not uncommon for a girl who enters the pit to not do so on her own, but with a good friend or a boyfriend⁶.

⁵ For example, after Woodstock '99, New York State police were investigating an alleged mosh pit rape during Limp Bizkit's Saturday night set.

⁶ A lot of moshers look down upon the girls who are protected by a male with his arms around her, as to them it goes against the rule of holding one's own in the pit – if a girl needs protection, she shouldn't be there in the first place.



Another well known part of a mosh pit is stagediving. To achieve a successful dive one first have to make ones way to the stage, which in itself can be a challenge unless the venue security allows it. Once one is up on stage, one make a run for it; throw oneself off the stage and into the crowd, which catches you. The scare (and

thrill) of the dive is the question of whether or not people will catch you, or get out of the way, sending you face first into the floor. Needless to say, there have been a lot of broken noses and other bones because of stagediving, and it is considered the most dangerous act out of the ones mentioned so far. In fact, several venues now ban stagediving, and put up signs warning that they will evict any member of the audience who attempt to make a dive.

However, it is fairly difficult to ban members of the band from stagediving, which is something members of rock bands will do from time to time. For example, at the Øya festival in Oslo during the summer of 2003, the lead vocalist of the rock band Amulet brought a springboard with him on stage. He then used it in the middle of their set between two songs to throw himself into the crowd, to the audience's screaming approval. Before he attempted the leap he cautioned the crowd that they had better catch him or the concert would effectively end. The scene was later broadcast on national television.

To an outsider moshing can be a petrifying sight, as to the unfamiliar eye the scene can easily come across as random acts of violence with no sense of control and no apparent code of conduct. However, the pit has its own sets of rules, a pit etiquette so to speak. What appears to a viewer can be described as a form of organized chaos, a group dance without steps. It is "a furious form of dancing combining very real violence with remarkable displays of emotion, life-and-death situations, and the raw sex beat of rock 'n' roll" as Joe Ambrose describes it so accurately in the introduction to his book *Mosh Pit Culture* (Ambrose, 2001: 1). From the simplest element of jumping on the spot in time to hurling one's body off the stage and into the crowd – none would be acting the way they are if it were not already acceptable in the rock community to do so.

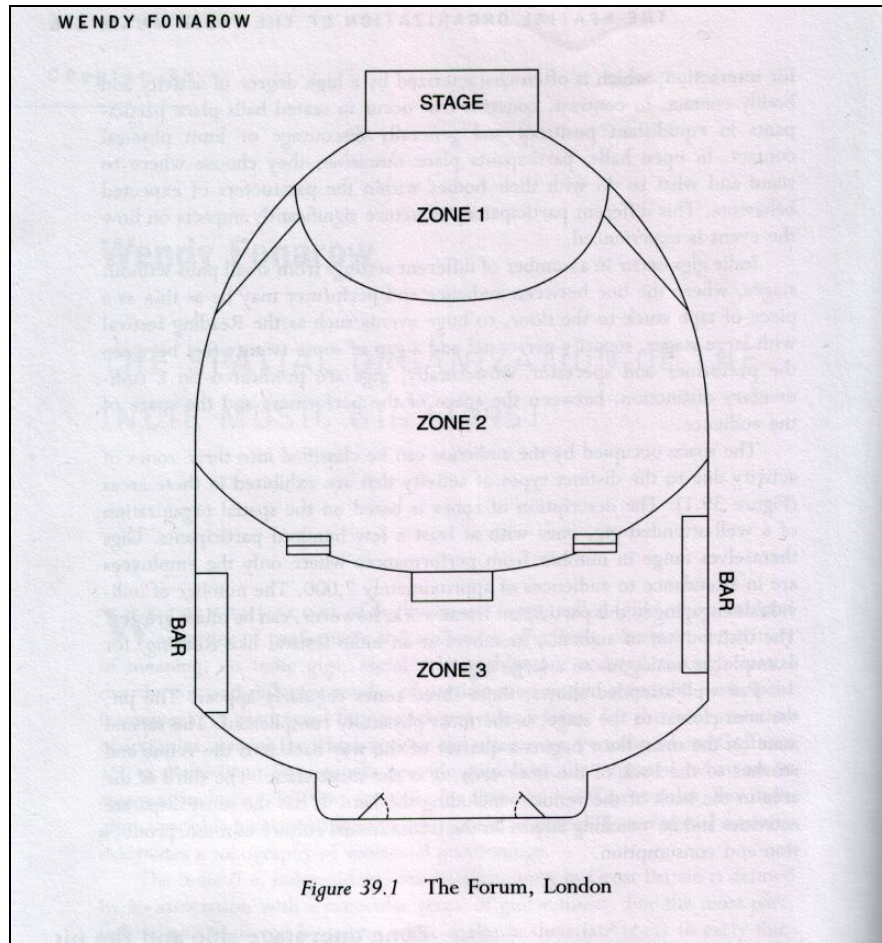


Figure 2 – Venue Zones

Since punk rock appeared, slam dancing has been not only accepted at rock concerts, but also expected by fans and musicians alike. The lack of an active pit at a concert is, more often than not, a sign that the fans are not having a good time: conversely the more active a pit is, the more the concert is judged as memorable. But make no mistake about it, very real violence does occur in the mosh pit, and some actors see the behaviour not as dancing but as a socially acceptable way of ‘kicking the shit out of people,’ as one mosher expressed it to me.

To illustrate these descriptions, see two excellent diagrams from Wendy Fonarow’s article *The Spatial Organization of the Indie Music Gig* (1995), published in The Subcultures Reader. Figure 2 shows how Fonarow separates the concert venue into three separate zones.

The activities described in these pages predominantly occur in zone one, the area located near the front of the stage.⁷ Figure 3 shows this zone in more detail and shows where the mosh pit is generally placed.

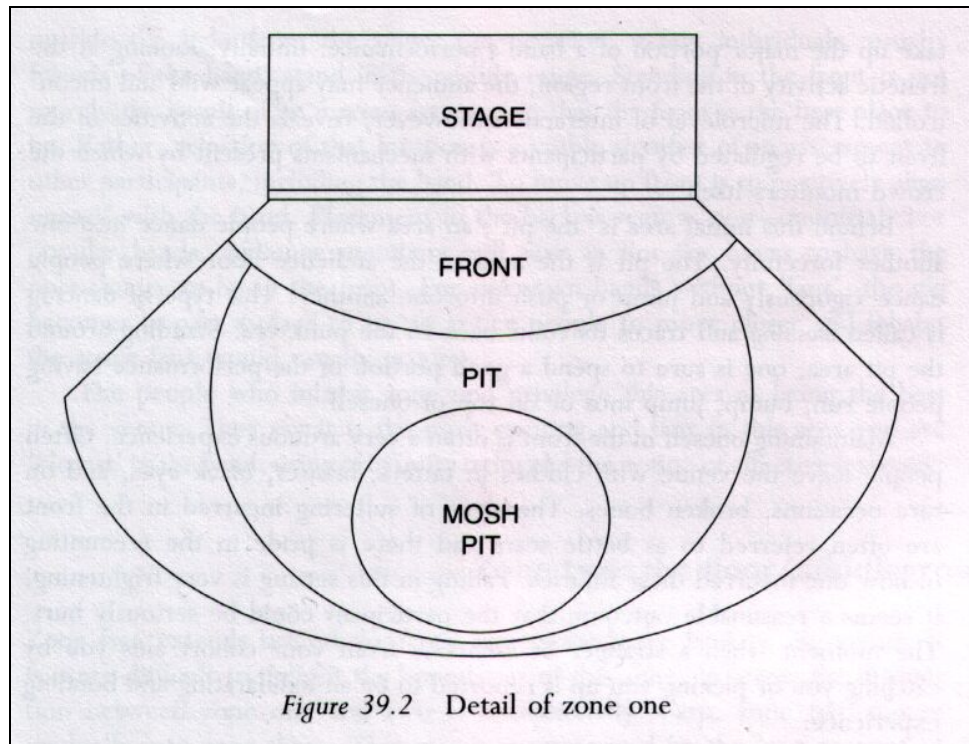


Figure 3 Detail of zone one

Fonarow describes the first zone in the following manner: “Zone one is the domain of greatest and most frenetic activity, the youngest audience and strongest statement of fanship.” (Fonarow, 1997: 361) The average mosher is young, and usually male. As the fan grows older he will retreat to the other zones of the venue where he can watch the band in peace, without having to deal with the frenetic activity around him. That’s not to say that all moshers are teenagers, or male. But moshing does take its toll on one’s body; one needs to be fit to endure being in the pit through an entire concert.

⁷ Moshing is not always limited to this area only; at some concerts the pit expands to fill the majority of the floor, not just a smaller area in front of the stage.

One of the sources for my interviews explained that entering the pit was, in addition to being an exclamation of musical joy, his only way of getting a workout, and thus the pit would keep him fit. An hour in the pit is a workout session that will drain one of energy, let there be no mistake about that. If one is not in good shape, one will not make it through easily. In a way moshing can be seen as a form of extreme sport, in that it is a thrilling experience in which the possibility of getting hurt is very clearly present. This is especially true in the case of stagediving. Of course, calling moshing a form of sport might be stretching the point a tad too far. However, I still feel a connection there can be drawn, if only with the similar mentality and adrenaline rush one can get while participating in an act that can leave one with serious injuries if one doesn't take precautions or happen to land in an unfortunate situation beyond one's control.

At this point an important part of the discussion centers on: the body. If there is one experience all participants in the mosh pit share, it is the connection between themselves and the music through the use of their bodies. Being in the pit requires listening to the music both with one's ears and the rest of one's body, and responding to the music aggressively. Intense emotions resulting in throwing one's entire being into the music, knocking into other people along the way. It is a collective thrust from merely watching, into participating, somehow stepping inside the music itself. It may not look like dancing, and there aren't many easily recognisable steps (although certain moves exist and have been named). Also the chaos of it all can make the movements of the crowd appear deprived of any reason or logic which one finds in so-called normal dancing. This point will be re-addressed in part 6, which explores moshing in comparison to dance and rave culture.

Different types of rock music result in different types of moshing, and the variations are greater than what they might appear to be at first glance. Typically, all types of moshing have the element of jumping up and down, but for some music there appear to be various distinctive moves, connected primarily to only that form of music. Take for example ska punk (sometimes referred to as plain ska, or third wave of ska), a musical form which combines ska, a form of reggae that often uses brass sections, and punk. To this music sometimes people can be seen *skanking*, which is essentially placing one's toes down, then

heel, jump to the other foot and repeat, rather like skipping on the spot. Considering the high tempo of the music it can look rather ridiculous, and it is a form of dancing that takes quite a lot of energy. It is also perhaps the move related to moshing that can be easily read as a dance.

The hardcore scene is the advanced scene for moshers; the music is often high in tempo and very intense both in rhythms and sound, often with vocals being screamed rather than sung,



which also serves as an intensifier. As hardcore for the most part is an underground scene, the fans tend to have a strong connection with the music and the scene, and a concert will attract less casual fans than concerts of better known artists. Again this is an influence on the behaviour of the audience, as more of the participants in the mosh pit of a hardcore show will be aware of the

unwritten rules of the pit, and one will be less likely to go into the pit until one has watched and learned for some time. This is due to the seemingly violent nature of the hardcore pits, which can be overwhelming when first experienced.

The hardcore scene is also perhaps the only environment that has specifically named moves used in the pit, such as the flying kick and windmilling. The moves may be applied to use at other venues, but this is the environment in which they originated. Flying kicks are literally what they sound like - people jumping in the air and kicking. Windmilling is basically rotating one's arms around in a manner akin to a windmill. Both of these moves are potentially very dangerous to anyone who happens to be in close proximity of the dancer.

To elaborate on what was stated earlier, the actions in the pit will develop differently with different types of music. More specifically, every concert with a standing section will have a pit. That doesn't necessarily mean the pit will turn into a mosh pit, even if the pit is filled with people who can't move.

But what does the audience themselves get out of the experience? I have communicated with rock fans in person and using the Internet; and this question results in a different answer for each person. Still, one can roughly establish three larger groups of participants at rock concert. Group one mosh because they feel it strengthens the experience of the concert, that moshing is their reacting to the music and showing their appreciation of it. Group two feels moshing releases tension and aggression, and the violent release appears to be the most important factor of moshing. This group tends to focus less on the music itself. The third group doesn't mosh whatsoever, and a quantity of these fans feel it should be banned at all venues. In my research results, the first group appears to be the largest. A combination of reason one and two also appears to be very common. It is also worth mentioning that a lot of fans also mention the music in itself as a release of negative feelings and tension, which draws the two even closer together. The results of my research results will be addressed further in part 4 and 5.

The majority of moshers this author has encountered do not see moshing as aggressive behaviour, even if aggression is involved to a point. The music is most certainly aggressive, and there is the chance of getting injured, but very few people who mosh are angry whilst



in the pit. Quite the contrary, most emphasize the joy they feel while moshing, the happiness that comes as a result of hearing powerful music. Indeed, the effect of the music makes the listeners feel empowered themselves, and in control. To these fans it appears that moshing feels like the natural mode of reacting positively to the music they are listening to. The definition of a positive reaction is not always smiling, and one can easily look like one's filled with overwhelming rage though still feeling ecstatically happy on the inside. At the same time, being in the mosh pit makes the musical experience stronger, with a sense of

connectedness between oneself and the other members of the crowd, as well as the performing band.

The feeling of connectedness goes both ways: a mosh pit with eager fans is as much a way for the band to feel connected to the crowd as the other way around. A good performance can encourage an active mosh pit, and an active mosh pit can then again compel the members of the band on stage to give the performance their all, and to work harder to keep the energy level up. The reactions of the mosh pit is a good indicator for a band to see just how well the concert is going, if the people in the pit are standing still with their arms crossed, just staring at the performers, the band is going to wonder what they are doing wrong.

With an active pit, more hands-on interaction between the band and the crowd can occur. It is not rare to see a singer stagedive into the crowd, or crowdsurf with his - or her microphone in



hand, still singing whilst rolling around on top of the crowd. It is also not uncommon witnessed a guitarists crowdsurfing with their guitars.

When Rammstein performed at Oslo Spektrum in November 2004, a member of the band floated over the crowd sitting in an inflated plastic boat, to the amusement of the audience.

Bands tend to encourage moshing, but at the same time look out for the fans so as to prevent serious injuries, and the music will generally be stopped if things are getting out of hand. The musicians tend to have insider knowledge on how moshing works, having at one point been moshers themselves, and sometimes still are. On the other hand, some bands discourage the forming of mosh pits, like The Mars Volta, who often ask the audience to refrain from moshing, requesting that they rather simply enjoy the music.⁸

⁸ In 2003, Mars Volta also asked the Oslo audience to put out their cigarettes, and apologized for “not being very rock ‘n roll.”

Experiences from the pit differ from person to person, and I find it appropriate to allow moshers to tell their own stories in these pages instead of just restricting them to being referenced to. Drawing on discussions of moshing with a number of music fans over the years, the explanations they offer are both interesting and diverse. For instance, when asked a moshers named Jon what drew him to the mosh pit, this was his reply:

I'd say the sense of fun really. To me, being down the front in the pit is the same kind of thrill that other people get from dancing in a night club or whatever. There's adrenaline in there... but mostly it's just the desire to have fun. At the end of the day, you only live once and what's life without enjoying yourself? (Survey response)

When asked of the risk of injuries, this was his reply:

I think that if you're going to indulge in high-contact activities (which let's face it, pitting is!) then you've got to expect to get hurt occasionally. Doesn't make it nice at all but if you can't take the heat get out of the kitchen. (Survey response)

The risk of injuries is on every moshers' mind. It is viewed as a part of the experience, something one has to take into account before one considers going into the mosh pit whatsoever. Another moshers named Shaun explained what drew him to partake in moshing in this way:

Usually I'll be in the pit because the band's music is filling me with so much adrenaline – or whatever it might be - that I feel I have to react in some way. Personally I dance, some people hit people. Perhaps their reasons are different; I know for some people the violence, whether receiving or giving, is a sort of release. (Survey response)

Notice how Shaun says, "I dance." It is common to find that, when talking about being in the pit, a large portion of the moshing crowd will never describe their behaviour as moshing or fighting - they feel it more correct to say that they are merely dancing. It may not look like dancing to one who is unfamiliar with the moves, but if dance can be described as the movement of a body to music, then one can easily also say that moshing is dancing. What is interesting is that where the fans draw the line between moshing and dancing depends on their own idea of what dance is, and what violence is. As such, it is not understood as the same by all who enter the same pit.

As both Shaun and Jon note, the violence in the pit is not to be ignored, and violence for the sake of violence - not as accidental injuries - is a part of the mosh pit culture which appears to be growing, especially at stadium concerts. The cardinal rules of the mosh pits are the following: 1) if you can't take the heat, get out of the pit and 2) if someone falls – help them up! It is common to hear complaints from long-time moshers that the younger crowd, which has been introduced to moshing through television (for example, the music video of “Smells



Like Teen Spirit” by Nirvana, with its heavy rotation on MTV in the early 90s), or only through stadium concerts, is not familiar with the unwritten rules or even the joy that moshing can be. Rather these younger fans seem to view a concert venue as an arena for, bluntly speaking, beating the crap out of other fans and it being socially acceptable.

When the connection of the crowd is broken, when it's every man for himself – that is when a mosh pit can become really dangerous. In the past it has happened that the crowd has gotten out of control and people have been trampled to death, as at the Roskilde festival in Denmark during Pearl Jam's set in 1999. This event left the rock community questioning the behaviour at concerts in a much deeper way than before. Bands and fans do attempt to make an effort to prevent people from getting hurt. For example, Shaun reported that fans of the band One Minute Silence in the UK had organised what they called the 'Near Death Experience Pit Krew'. This “Krew” takes it upon themselves to look after fellow fans in the crowd, to secure a safer pit, and with that to make it more fun for all. Very few people who frequently attend concerts feel moshing itself should be banished from concerts, and it is unlikely that it is something that will ever happen.

3. Genre differences – pits and the music

3.1. Introduction

As previously mentioned, different types of music will result in a different form of bodily movement in the pit. While it does happen, moshing as dance is connected particularly to the rock scene. It grew and expanded as the music did, from the early days of punk when it was born, to hardcore punk when it flourished and evolved into a richer form of dance with specified moves, to a somewhat more subdued version as seen in the pits of grunge bands.

A number of factors are involved in shaping the pit, such as fashion and the media, but the most important factor in the pit has always been the music. Music shapes every movement, with the crowd following the song. It has never been the other way around. At this point it would be fruitful to examine the history of the pit, to see how the music it grew out of and the mentality of the time reflects in the behaviour witnessed in the crowds at the time.

As previously mentioned, slamdancing, pogoing and other forms of moshing were first encountered in the punk scene in the 70s. Allan F. Moore describes punk as “a short-lived movement whose historical importance may prove to be very limited.” (Moore, 2001: 129), and though the peak of punk was indeed short-lived, I suspect Moore underestimates the importance of punk. I agree in the sense that the music in itself probably does not leave a lasting legacy. However, the legacy of the surrounding subculture - with its sense of style, community and organization of fanbases with its rejection of the mainstream and a strong sense of DIY approach to just about everything from



clothes to fanzines to playing guitar –remains and expands. Although one cannot say how the future will view our recent history, I dare say punk will receive more attention than other short-lived fashion trends like , for instance, glam rock.

The punk scene in the UK, with bands like the Sex Pistols and the Clash, tended to receive the most attention. However the US also had an influential punk scene with bands like the New York Dolls, and punk inspired a number of different directions in the alternative scene. Of these, the best known to the mainstream crowd would be grunge, but more important to this discussion would be hardcore, a genre which had its peak in the US in the 80s.

Punk rock was musically “loud, fast and abrasive” (Shuker, 1998: 237), and by 1979 the punk scene in southern California had all but died out.

Hipsters had moved on to arty post-punk bands (...). They were replaced by a bunch of toughs coming in from outlying suburbs who were only beginning to discover punk’s speed, power, and aggression. They didn’t care that punk rock was already being dismissed as a spent force, kid bands playing at being the Ramones a few years too late. Dispensing with all pretension, these kids boiled the music down to its essence, then revved up the tempos to the speed of a pencil impatiently tapping on a school desk, and called the result “hardcore.” (Azerrad, 2001: 13)

While not becoming a fashion trend to the extent of punk, hardcore had a strong influence on how the underground music culture was organised. One area where hardcore was particularly popular was San Diego.

3.2. The hardcore punk scene of San Diego in the early to mid 80s

As told by one of my informants, Aspasia, who I will return to later, The San Diego alternative scene in the 80s wasn’t what you would describe as a friendly, open and welcoming environment. In fact, it was such a violent scene that a lot of bands wouldn’t even come there to play, because they feared for their safety. While some subcultural environments were welcoming to new faces, this was not a place you would want to be on your own. The scene was divided into gangs, between which there were frequent conflicts.

Aspasia belonged to the East County punks, and explained to me that one did not have any choice in what gang one was affiliated with; you automatically belonged to the gang from your own home area. Aspasia was an angry young man: “I was angry, I was a punk, and the two combined was dangerous.” This was the norm in the scene; the pits were exceedingly violent, with gang fights frequently breaking out in the pit. These were not merely fist fights, but also involved weapons like knives and chains, resulting in a bloody scenario. Arrangers were forced to change the halls where concerts were held after every two or three shows because of the violence, and some halls got torn down due to police riots.

I’ve spent a lot of time talking about the connectedness between fans in the pit, but feeling such a connectedness was rare in San Diego. Everyone knew if you went into the pit you were on your own, minus gang affiliations, and what happened in the pit could carry over into an after party. It was an aggressive scene, fuelled by angry music, combined with copious amounts of alcohol and drugs (speed in particular) and situations would frequently get out of hand. Through saying one wrong word or bumping into the wrong person in the pit, fights could break out.



For example, when hardcore band Dead Kennedys from San Francisco visited the area, the situation went out of control. Professional bouncers had been hired for the concert, and the punks were taunting them. One punk jumped on the stage and was skanking around when a bouncer pulled him down. This prompted approximately one hundred punks to stand up and attack the bouncers, of whom there were only ten, thus were completely outnumbered. The bouncers hadn’t expected to be ganged up on, and surely not that the band would cheer the punks on. The police were called and the show was stopped, forcing the punks outside where an armed S.W.A.T. team of roughly a hundred police officers was waiting for them. The crowd dispersed around the downtown area, and a riot broke out with punks breaking into cars, busting windows and creating rampage.

In another incident, a member of punk band The Exploited made the mistake of making a snide comment from the stage referring to San Diego with the words “This city sucks,” after having difficulties with the PA system. This didn’t go over well with the local crowd, whose response started with a full beer can being thrown at the lead singer, and progressed to tearing the stage apart and destroying the band’s instruments.

3.3. Narrowing the frame – a look at different pits

Aspasia referred to the pits she⁹ saw as punk rock pits, separating them from other types of pits. I want to extend further distinctions to various forms of pits, to connect them more to the music they are responding to. This is in order to show how the music plays an active role in how a pit behaves.

The sort of pits I have come across most frequently, are the type of pits that were connected to the music of the early 90s, seen with popular grunge bands like Nirvana and Pearl Jam. This is the most mainstream known version of the mosh pit. Thus, while I refer to all violent and aggressive pits as mosh pits in these pages, when narrowing it down, the pits of grunge, alternative rock and pop punk reflect what is commonly understood as the mosh pit by the vast majority. While punk rock pits and hardcore pits are still frequently seen, the scene has mellowed and the level of aggression is nowhere near what it used to be. Pits changed as the music changed, and punks like Aspasia looked down on the grunge fans: “I always thought of it as middleclass kinds trying to pretend to be punk.” The accusation isn’t too far off: grunge can be seen as a distilled, more mainstream-appropriate version of punk (although still undoubtedly inspired by the genre), as it was considered less offensive to the suburban middleclass environments from which a fair amount of the fans hailed. The grunge pits were significantly milder than the ones in the days of punk.

⁹ Though I’ve earlier referred to Aspasia as an “angry young man,” it is not a mistake that I later refer to her as “she.” Why will be explained in part 7, concerning identity and gender construction in the pit.

Punk music was by its nature very aggressive both in lyrics and sound, and the sense of rebellion against *everything* was strong within the scene, which as demonstrated transferred to crowd behaviour. Early pits developed out of the aggression inherent in the mentality of the punk scene, and as the music has evolved and changed, so has pit behaviour.

Genres and pits

| Genre | Pit type | Typical movements |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--|
| Mainstream pop | “Normal” pit | Dancing, striving to get closer to the stage |
| Punk rock | Punk pit | Slamdancing, pogoing, jumping, occasionally fighting. |
| Hardcore Punk | Hardcore pit | Slamdancing, moshing, jumping, special movements like flying kicks and windmilling, circle pits. |
| Grunge | Mosh pit | Jumping, bouncing, crowdsurfing, arms in the air. |
| Alternative Rock (garage rock etc) | Mosh pit | Similar to grunge |
| Mainstream Punk or Punk-Pop | Mosh pit | Similar to grunge |
| Heavy Metal (80s) | Metal pit | Headbanging, jumping, metal signs, crowdsurfing |
| Metal | Metal pit | Depending on the music, mostly headbanging, moshing and crowdsurfing if the speed is fitting |
| Death Metal | Metal pit | Often limited to headbanging and arm movement, due to the music moving too fast for feet movement. |

Figure 4 – Pit types

To elaborate on this point further, I have outlined a number of different genres and the pit behaviours connected to them in figure 4. In doing so I hope to make clearer how the pits are connected to the music. I will do this by showing the distinctions of each genre, and what forms of bits and moves one will usually see in connection with each one.

By mainstream pop, I am referring to pop acts like Britney Spears, Justin Timberlake, Christina Aguilera and similar chart/radio-friendly acts. Pop music contains a variety of genres, but for the purpose of my argument I single out the pop acts that attract a number of teenage fans for their live shows, comparative to the mainly young fans seen in the fanbases of the lesser-known genres of rock. My reading of the mainstream pits has already been described in part 2.

For the various forms of rock and metal I turn to the Allmusic website (<http://www.allmusic.com>) to aid me in terms of genre definitions, starting with punk rock.

Punk Rock returned rock & roll to the basics -- three chords and a simple melody. It just did it louder and faster and more abrasively than any other rock & roll in the past”(Allmusic)



Returning to the basics indeed - virtuosity is hardly understood as an ideal to strive towards for either punk bands or the punk fans. Punk pits are, as mentioned, the earliest mosh pits we know of, with pogoing and slamdancing being the main forms of movement. Bands of the genre include The Clash, Sex Pistols and Stiff Little Fingers.

Out of punk rock grew hardcore punk, or just hardcore, a more extreme variation.

Emerging in the early '80s, hardcore took the ideals of punk as far as it could go. The music was impossibly fast, the vocals were shouted, the riffs were simple, and the records looked (and sounded) like they were made in someone's basement. (Allmusic)

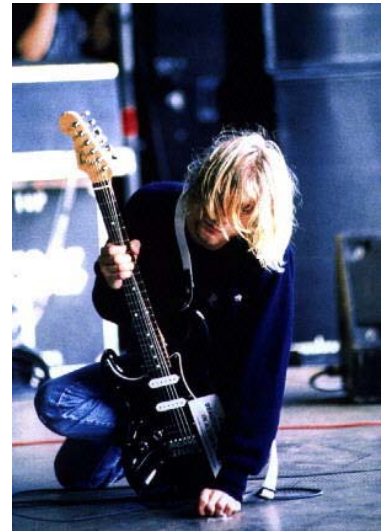
It was in the hardcore scene that the unwritten rules of the pit were thoroughly established, and as the music was faster and more intense than punk rock, the crowds expanded their movements in a similar fashion. In hardcore pits it is more common to see distinctive moves which are named, as well as a more frequent inclination of fans being drawn towards the pit

for the pit in and of itself. Important bands include Black Flag, Dead Kennedys and Minor Threat.

Hardcore was one of the styles which influenced the music of Nirvana, arguably the most important grunge band.

Grunge was a hybrid of heavy metal and punk. Though the guitars were straight from early '70s metal, the aesthetic of grunge was far from metal. Both the lyrical approach and musical attack of grunge were adopted from punk, particularly the independent ideals of early '80s American hardcore. Nirvana was more melodic than their predecessors and they also had signature stop-start dynamics, which became a genre convention nearly as recognizable as fuzzy, distorted guitars. After Nirvana crossed over into the mainstream, grunge lost many of its independent and punk connections and became the most popular style of hard rock in the '90s.¹⁰ (Allmusic)

Those stop-start dynamics in the music were transferred to the crowd, acting as stop-start buttons for the bodily movements of fans as well. It's around this period in time that moshing became better known outside of the underground, through MTV and larger arena shows. Also playing into the spreading of pit knowledge was the movie *Wayne's World*, which came out the year after Nirvana's debut album *Nevermind* was released. A very successful movie about slackers and rock fans, *Wayne's World* featured a scene in which the two lead characters attend an Alice Cooper concert where they both surf the crowd. While the film's soundtrack consisted generally of 80s hard rock bands, the dress sense of the two main characters was typical of the grunge scene, and their slacker mentality was also a stereotype of the time. The pivotal scene of the film showed the characters with their friends, listening to Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" in their car, singing along and



¹⁰ Other important bands of the genre include Soundgarden, Alice in Chains and Pearl Jam.

headbanging to the chorus. This is a scene that - more than any music video - really brought headbanging to the attention of a wider audience.¹¹



Although alternative rock is an umbrella term which covers several styles of rock, the term is usually applied to rock music made in the 90s. Bands that are often described using this term (instead of grunge, etc) include The Smashing Pumpkins, My Bloody Valentine and Pixies. The crowds these bands attracted would usually be similar to those of grunge bands, and the pits of grunge and

Alternative rock aren't much different, if at all.

Though there is a variety of musical styles within Alternative Rock, they are all tied together since they existed outside of the mainstream. In some ways, there are two waves of alternative bands, with Nirvana's success in 1991 acting as a dividing point. (...) During the '80s, alternative included everything from jangle pop, post-hardcore punk, funk metal, punk pop, and experimental rock. After Nirvana's popularity in the '90s, alternative included all of these subgenres, but many of the edges were sanded off because the music was now being marketed as part of the mainstream. (Allmusic)

Mainstream punk, or punk-pop, refers to bands like Green Day, Blink-182 and Weezer, particularly at the start of Weezer's career.

Punk-Pop is a post-grunge strand of alternative rock that combines power-pop melodies and chord changes with speedy punk tempos and loud guitars. (Allmusic)

Punk-pop is a more mainstream-oriented genre than the other variations of punk mentioned, as the genre is more easily accessible and highly profiled by MTV. The somewhat bouncy feel of the music makes it very mosh-friendly, and it attracts the same kind of movements as grunge.



The previous three genres mentioned can all be described as alternative rock, and what follows can all be understood as metal, starting with heavy metal.

¹¹ "Bohemian Rhapsody" was re-released as a single in 1992 as a result of the attention from the film, reaching number 2 in the U.S. charts and number 1 in the U.K., seven years after the original release of the single (in 1975), when it also reached the top spot in the U.K.

Of all rock & roll's myriad forms, heavy metal is the most extreme in terms of volume, machismo, and theatricality. There are numerous stylistic variations on heavy metal's core sound, but they're all tied together by a reliance on loud, distorted guitars (usually playing repeated riffs) and simple, pounding rhythms. (Allmusic)

When referring to heavy metal, I mean to point to the 80s understanding of the term, the chart-topping acts which attracted huge followings, such as Def Leppard, Guns 'N Roses and Bon Jovi. Prior to the popularity of Grunge in the 90s, these were the bands my interview subjects grew up with and remember seeing performing on television, their music videos commonly showing the band on stage in a venue of significant size. For many, these videos would be their first introduction to crowd behavior. However, there is less moshing in metal compared to in punk and alternative rock. Instead, metal fans more often can be seen



headbanging rather than moshing, flashing the metal hand sign in the air towards the stage, and playing air guitar. There is less of the jumping around in the pit, and stage diving and crowd surfing occurs more frequently.

There are a myriad of different styles of metal, all of which differ in speed, style and fan behaviour. The movement of the metal crowd depends entirely on the music, and whether the rhythm is in a tempo appropriate for moshing. In general it appears that while moshing does occur with some bands, such as Metallica (who during one tour had a pit they called the 'snake pit' incorporated into their stage design), it is virtually impossible to move in time to other bands. This is either because they play too slowly for it to feel natural to jump up and down, or the music is too fast, making it almost impossible to follow the beats without stumbling on your own feet. As a result, it's easier to just move your head and neck, showing your appreciation with headbanging and raising your arms in the air.



Lastly I turn attention to death metal, in which moshing rarely occurs at all.

Death Metal grew out of the thrash metal in the late '80s. Taking the gritty lyrics and morbid obsessions of thrash to extremes, death metal was -- as its name suggests -- solely about death, pain, and suffering. These relentlessly bleak lyrics were set to loud, heavy riffs that owed as much to the lumbering metal of Black Sabbath as it did to Metallica. Death metal bands also owed a debt to the complex song structures of '70s art rockers, though most of these winding, intricate compositional methods were learned through Metallica. (Allmusic)

Death metal has a strong fanbase in Norway, its country of origin. Popular bands include Entombed, Borknagar and Carcass. As can be seen at the annually-held Inferno festival in Oslo, fans of this and similar genres rarely mosh, at least not in Oslo. However, they headbang a lot, and bands in the genre are so involved with the headbanging as they play that it is seen as a skill in itself, one that should be



perfected alongside performing on an instrument. Moshing would possibly be frowned upon at the Inferno festival unless it was to a band with the appropriate rhythm and noise level of the guitars.

Moshing requires more dynamic changes than what are usually found in the monotone and dark sounds of death metal or the formulaic quality of pop songs. To demonstrate how an especially mosh-friendly song works alongside the audience I have decided to display and describe a scene in action.

3.4. The pit in action – a reading of Rage Against The Machine



As an example of how the pit works, I have chosen to attach a DVD of a live performance of the American band Rage Against The Machine, a band whose music is very mosh-friendly. Their song “Killing in the name of” was cited by a number of my interview subjects as their favourite song to

mosh to. The band's live performances were known as spectacular, filled with energy, aggression and movement on the stage. I was told by one person that her most intense mosh experience was at a Rage Against the Machine concert, and that no concert since has ever come close to topping that thrill for her.

Jason Ankeny at allmusic describes the band in this manner;

Rage Against the Machine earned acclaim from disenfranchised fans (and not insignificant derision from critics) for their bombastic, fiercely polemical music, which brewed sloganeering leftist rants against corporate America, cultural imperialism, and government oppression into a Molotov cocktail of punk, hip-hop, and thrash. (Allmusic)

The DVD *Live at the Grand Olympic Auditorium* is a recording of the band's final live performance, which took place in Los Angeles on September 13, 2000. The group disbanded later that year, and the DVD was released three years later.



| Rage Against The Machine - Bulls On Parade | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Part | Start | End | Description | Rhythm Pattern |
| 1 | 01:33 | 01:39 | Microphone Check | |
| 2 | 01:40 | 02:23 | Calm guitar | |
| 3 | 02:24 | 02:45 | Full band intro | Intro 1 |
| 4 | 02:46 | 02:57 | Guitar only intro | Intro 2 |
| 5 | 02:58 | 03:07 | Full band hit | Intro 2 |
| 6 | 03:08 | 03:31 | Verse 1 | Verse |
| 7 | 03:32 | 03:54 | Chorus 1 | Chorus |
| 8 | 03:55 | 04:17 | Verse 2 | Verse |
| 9 | 04:18 | 04:39 | Chorus 2 | Chorus |
| 10 | 04:40 | 04:51 | Bridge | Intro 2 |
| 11 | 04:52 | 05:13 | Guitar solo | Verse |
| 12 | 05:14 | 05:24 | Guitar only bridge | Intro 2 |
| 13 | 05:25 | 05:34 | Full band hit | Intro 2 |
| 14 | 05:35 | 05:47 | Full band with screamed vocals | Intro 2 |
| 15 | 05:48 | | Outro | Intro 1 |

Figure 5 – 'Bulls on parade' outline

I have chosen for analysis the first track of the concert, “Bulls on parade”¹² from their second album, “Evil Empire”. I have outlined the song into parts (Figure 5), creating a graphic presentation (Figure 6) of what I refer to as the intensity of the music/movement of each part of the song.

I’ve included the first two parts to show the anticipation and movement in the crowd before the song really gets started, which, as one can see on the DVD, shows both band and crowd getting into gear for the concert. When the calm guitar part starts, you see a wide shot from the side, the band is covered in blue light, and the crowd in front of the stage has a slow, wave-like movement to it. A couple of people are jumping on the spot to beats only heard in their heads, and several others raise their arms towards the stage. The singer, Zack, is pacing on the stage, his face concentrated. The camera switches to a wide shot of the stage from the front, and Zack walks toward the centre of the stage, positioning himself for the start of the song.

As the band kicks into the first tones of the intro, the backdrop falls to reveal a large red star behind the band, to the approving screams of fans. The band plays while jumping in time to the beat, and Zack is banging his head up and down, his dreadlocks flowing in the air, his arms moving to his chest and almost crossing. In the pit the fans are jumping up and down to the same beat as the band. As the bass and drums go silent for part 4 and the groove changes in the guitar, the crowd calms down, until Zack addresses them with a “What’s up, Los Angeles!” The crowd raises their arms and roars in response.

2:57 shows a close-up of the pit, in front of the stage. One sees a man being pulled out of the crowd, and he looks angry. Why is he angry? Is it because the pit is too tight, or because he’s unhappy about being pulled out of it? Only he knows. The shot cuts to other fans with their hands in the air, some displaying the metal hand sign.

¹² Chapter 2 on the DVD

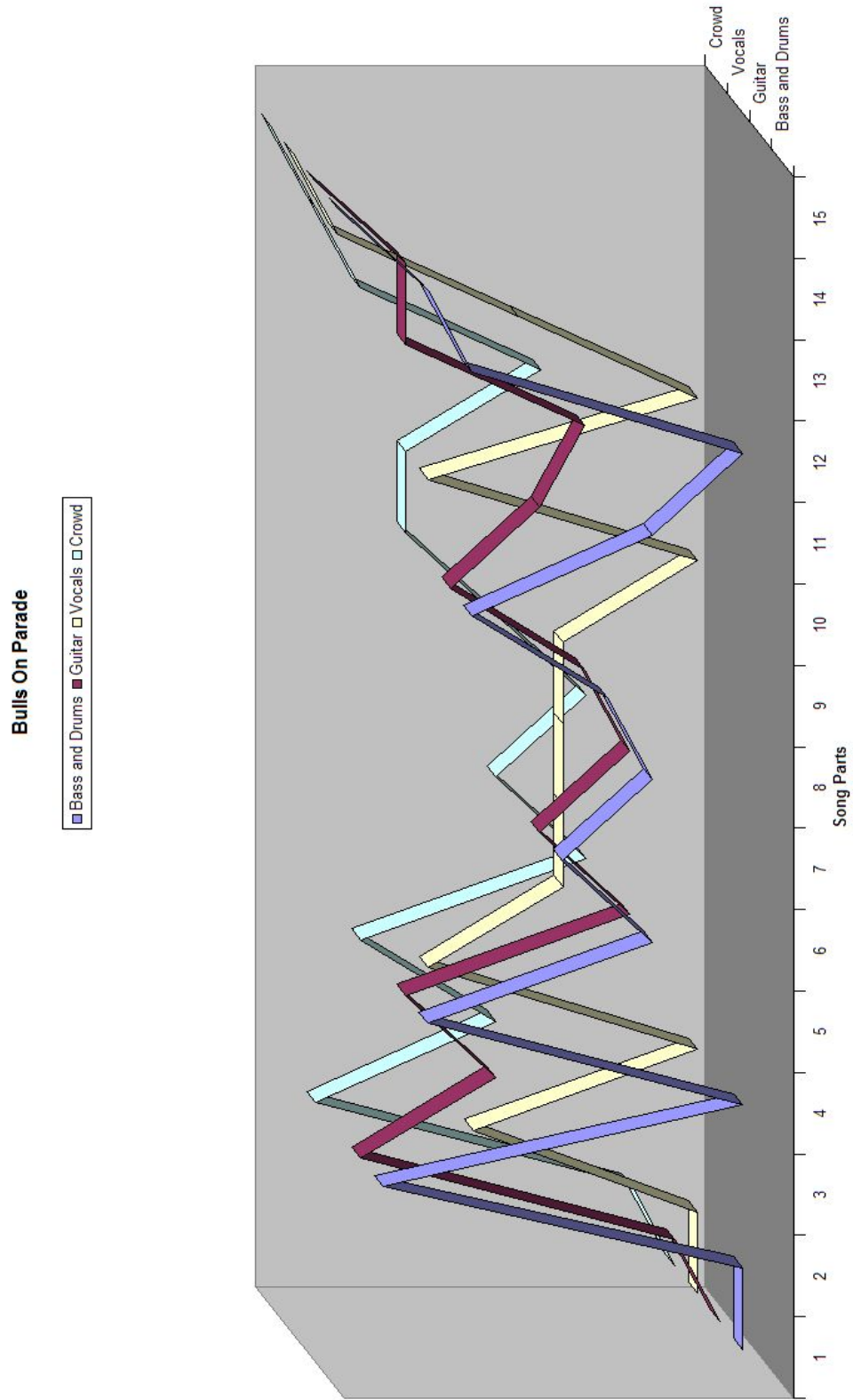


Figure 6

As I have shown in Figure 5, there are four different rhythm patterns in ‘Bulls on Parade’.¹³ The different rhythms are important and when the rhythm shifts so do the movements of the crowd. Starting with intro one, there is a hard and precise rhythm; while the emphasis is not always on the beat, a fairly strict 4-beat is maintained, with a hard punch on each stroke



A rhythm of this kind is ideal for moshing: as the fans jump on the beat, the emphasis of the beat in the rhythm resonates as an instruction through the crowd. When the groove is as rigid as in the intro along with all the instruments and no vocals, it is evident to the fans that this is where you really move.

The intro continues into a second pattern, initially only played by the guitar.



Next comes a straightforward sort of rhythm, but only being held by one instrument gives it less punch, and the crowd mellows. As the dynamics of the crowd follows the band, when only one instrument is playing, the crowd will usually calm down and wait for their cue, which quickly comes as the rest of the band joins in on this rhythm. Together the band and the crowds reach the first peak before the first verse.

Typically, in mosh-friendly songs, the emphasis lies in the chorus (and to some extent the bridges), and less in the verse. The verse is a period to quieten down somewhat and regain strength for the punch of the chorus, as illustrated by the following example of the change of rhythm.



¹³ Initial introverted guitar intro not included, as its presence is more preparatory than anything else, this part is not included in the studio recording of the song.

The difference here is that the syncopated beat does not rest on the count, but rather before and after. It's a style with more flow and ease, and does not invite jumping up and down. For this, one needs the strict beat of the intro or the chorus. As the band play the verse, the crowd behaves in a more relaxed manner. They dance and move on the floor, punching into the air and screaming along to Zack's spoken lyrics. The crowd does not stand still, as seen on the DVD, and a wave appears to go back and forth in the pit, moving people around. A man is seen crowdsurfing, being rolled over people, gesticulating in the air at the same time.

The chorus is similar to the intro in rhythm and punch, but not quite as rough, and does not push the audience to a similar peak as the band intro does. This is mainly because the rhythm is more fragmented and not as hard hitting on each beat as the intro, but it still has more of a four-beat feeling than the verse.



The body movement of the singer is relatively calm in this part, controlled, and this is reflected by the crowd. As we turn to the second verse, the groove returns but Zack is now closer to the edge of the stage, addressing the crowd more directly. As he connects with the crowd they become more attuned to his movements as well. The second chorus breaks out, and a wide shot is shown with mild to medium movement in the crowd. They know the song, and they are holding back for the peak they know is coming. A closer shot of the crowd shows a crowdsurfing man being pushed backwards, his legs being raised towards the roof as he's flipped over in reverse.

The rhythm in the bridge is the same as intro2, and starts off with Zack bouncing on stage, a movement echoed in the crowd. The part is cut short after only four measures, as it turns back to the verse rhythm for the guitar solo. The solo starts off fairly quietly, but when Zack encourages the crowd to jump by shouting instructions to them, it gets them going and the curve changes to turn back up. Then the rest of the band leave the guitar to play the movement from intro2, and the crowd screams as it builds up to what they know is coming. As the remainder of the band joins in, Zack jumps on the spot, shouts, moves around on the stage until he reaches the peak of the vocals. He screams at the top of his lungs: "Bulls on

Parade!” He’s positioned sideways now, jumping in the middle of the stage, headbanging, his braids flowing up and down in the air in front of his face, with an arm clutched in front of him as if he’s protecting himself from himself. He moves to the side of the stage, screams the line again to an appreciative crowd where the pit is jumping along to the beat, and then he moves quickly back to the middle of the stage as the outro repeats the rhythm from intro1. The song - having built upwards - now peaks and the intensity level of the crowd does the same.

A wide shot of the crowd shows a lot of movement of bodies, heads and arms, and punching in the air. Also, in the middle back of the shot you can see that a circle pit has broken out with a portion of the crowd. Zack shouts the line a last time as we cut to the front of the stage. The fans are jumping in time to the music until the song stops, and an approving roar from the fans fills the room.

There exists no model for the perfect mosh song, but a use of dynamics similar to the ones in “Bulls on Parade” is not uncommon in the alternative rock genre, and such use makes for good moshing songs. Take for example the much talked about “Smells Like Teen Spirit” by Nirvana - it is constructed in a similar manner, starting off with a strong and dynamically high levelled intro before mellowing down for the verse, and then jumping straight up again in the first chorus. In this particular song, the way the guitar strings are struck is also indicative of how the crowd moves: the softer the stroke, the calmer the crowd. As far as I have seen, this is a relatively common feature in the grunge genre of rock.

4. The Internet Mosh Project – 2004

The Internet Mosh Project is a survey project I completed in April 2004, with the intention of getting deeper into the reasoning and frame of mind of individual moshers. I was searching for similarities and differences in how *they* felt when entering the pit, what drove them there, and what sort of emotional reactions they had to the experiences.

My understanding of how the pit is experienced by different people is largely based on direct communication with fans, and I felt I needed to get a larger group of informants -not selected by myself - to reach a better understanding of how the pit is viewed by fans at the current time. Using ethnographic methods, I decided that a survey would be preferable as a way of collecting data. I decided to use the Internet as a research tool with the hope of reaching as many people as possible.

I compiled a list of questions about people's reactions towards moshing, for instance if they participate in the action themselves, if they had ever been injured, if they thought it should be banned in venues, etc. The survey was created as an HTML document, presented as a form to be filled in, and then posted to my personal website. My virtual informants would then fill in their replies, which would be e-mailed directly to me.¹⁴ The link to this page was then posted on a considerable variety of message boards dedicated to bands and genres which I felt were fitting, and forwarded to people with whom I had been in direct contact with over time. These efforts resulted in people from several different countries of origin posting in their blogs the information I had provided, along with the direct link to the survey.¹⁵ Within a week I had received over 80 responses.

The reasoning behind using the Internet as a tool in my research is that it is a communications tool that, at this point in time, is actively used by teenagers across the globe.

¹⁴ See attached the survey as posted, with five response samples

¹⁵ Blog is an abbreviation of "web log" and is a personal journal posted online, enabling Internet users to easily express their own thoughts, memories and interests. A variety of web sites dedicated to personal weblogs exist on the Internet, for example at <http://www.livejournal.com/> and <http://www.blogspot.com>

Message boards dedicated to bands are very popular, some generating hundreds of posts daily. The age group I particularly hoped to hear from through this study has grown up with this form of media, members of this generation are not only familiar with the Internet, but are active participants in developing it further through content and usage. Information about their interests is more easily accessible than was the case for me when I was growing up. While I would religiously go to the newsstand every Monday and buy magazines to read about my favourite bands in my teenage years, today's teens can log onto the Internet and get all the information they'd ever want and more in a matter of minutes. They can also easily get in touch with other people with similar interests, and form virtual communities where the common ground may be no more than the one band they all like, and this is enough for them to feel like they belong. Everyone can find a place suitable for them on the net, and if a venue of your preference doesn't already exist, it is not difficult to create one.

With this tool I could - with some effort - get in touch with fans from a lot of different areas at the same time. Posting a survey on the web was also a way of being more informal, speaking more directly to the people whom I was attempting to get in contact with, in an environment that was comfortable for both them and myself. The sheer amount of people I could potentially reach through the Internet



was much greater than any number I could possibly hope to gather with a survey only done locally, which would in no way feel sufficient in this subject matter. Moshing is experienced differently for different people, and their reasons as to why they mosh and definitions of what moshing is also differ. What you take with you into moshing is reflected in how you experience it, or at least that is my impression.

The negative implication of using the Internet was - most notably - that fans who do not have the economic means necessary for having access to a personal computer or the Internet would not be represented in this survey whatsoever. Another negative implication was that

the method used could be understood by readers as spam¹⁶ and thus make them reluctant to visit the site. Apart from those vocal few who voiced their negative opinions of my project, the majority of my responses were overwhelmingly positive. Most respondents were open to me pursuing further discussion via email, and their descriptions more often than not seemed well thought-through, not just quickly thrown together. I also received recommendations of books and articles it was thought would be helpful to me in my work.

It should be noted that most of the message boards where the survey was posted were for well-known bands in the alternative rock scene (bands like Blink 182, Muse, and Metallica) as well as more general message boards regarding different genres of rock. In other words, most of the respondents to this survey were of the more mainstream audience: while some of them may have been fans of punk and hardcore, I did not specifically target the punk audience.

The least surprising part of the replies to my survey was that they were overwhelmingly positive towards moshing, which was expected. I had stated in my initial requests that I wanted to hear both from people who felt positively towards moshing, as well as those whose feelings were more negative. However, due to the nature of the message boards on which the requests were posted, I doubted very much that I would come across any significant number of people who felt moshing was more a negative and disturbing element rather than an accepted part of a concert. I was proven to be right in that assumption: the number of respondents who were more negative towards moshing was limited to 16. A couple of the respondents were more ambivalent in their feelings towards moshing, but the majority were generally positively inclined towards moshing. Also not surprising was that the majority had a lot of experience of going to concerts and being in the mosh pit. However, what did surprise me was the high number of female respondents, which was about 40 %.

¹⁶ Spam according to Merriam-Webster: “unsolicited usually commercial e-mail sent to a large number of addressed. Spam is an annoyance to all users of the Internet”

A very important question for me in researching moshing has always been *Why do people mosh?* – and this survey gave an account of different reasonings fans themselves saw for their own behaviour.

The respondents with mosh experience seemed to be divided into two groups. The first group of people ended up in the pit through a wish of being closer to the stage and being nearer to the band, and the others seemed to view it as part of the gig experience. As far as I can see this reflects accurately on the concerts I have been witness to over the course of years. The people who are in the pit usually have different intentions for placing themselves that close to the stage. As previously mentioned, pits often form from the desire of the fans to be as close as possible to the band, and I do not in any way doubt that this is the case for the majority of fans. However, most - if not all - rock fans, at least the ones with some concert experience, expect the pit to be an area of acting out their feelings towards the music which is being played. While a fair amount put it down to “fun”, a couple of moshers embellished their descriptions.

Release is a description that was given frequently. Mosher May-Helen described moshing as:

a great catharsis for our natural aggression. It goes something like this: Acting out behaviour that to a certain degree is aggressive, but with happiness and a positive feeling for the people around, and thus with no intention of hurting anyone. (Survey response)

Mosher Cathy agreed: “moshing is an unbridled release of aggression.” An older mosher is more ambivalent when he wrote, “I supposed I enjoyed it to release stress.”

Several respondents compared moshing to dance, or just called it dance, period. An unnamed mosher described it thus: “it’s a form of dance. If the music is good, I want to dance.”

A connection with the music is also important, like for mosher Tamera:

I mosh because it makes me feel connected with the music, it is the whole experience that makes the show great for me. I love being one with the crowd and going crazy, enjoying the moment and getting into the music. (Survey Response)

Connectedness to the music and the band appeared to be important to several moshers, but the vast majority stated “release” and/or “fun” as their main motivation, the former being most predominant in the responses. The feeling of connection to the others in the crowd is mentioned by few, almost as if they either didn’t feel such a connection or simply because they felt it didn’t need to be mentioned, as if it to them was obvious that this is the case. I believe it may be the latter, as a connection within the crowd is felt by most moshers, or why else would they not be concerned with the intensity and potential danger of the situation? The answer I think lies in the trust felt within the group, even if no words have been exchanged.

Meet moshers Steph. She has had plenty of concert experiences, and she sees moshing as a form of expression. She described her best moshing experience like this:

I was in a small group towards to the back of the crowd once and we stuck together the entire show and afterwards we all shook hands and said goodbye. We were all complete strangers. (Survey response)

Through this small paragraph one can read that, for Steph moshing is a way to feel connected not only to the music and the band, but also to the other participants in the group: total strangers who she may have nothing in common with apart from the connection inherent in the situation.

Steph continued:

Moshing gets the adrenaline pumping for me. Immediately afterwards there’s a euphoria, like a natural high for about a day. Any scars or bruises are worn like battle injuries. (Survey response)

Their own interpretation of incentive is one thing, but I also wanted to know how moshers would articulate the feelings brought forward by being in the pit. In retrospect I should have phrased the question differently as I got several responses simply along the line of “sweaty” or “tired.” As above, the theme of release was predominant in the responses, along with energy. Mosher Jayna:

It makes me feel like I can get out every form of aggression I have. After I feel my adrenaline going (I love that feeling), I have all this energy that I don’t know what to do with. (Survey response)

Jayna described feeling empowered and strong in the pit, like she has replaced negative feelings with positive ones.

Mosher Debbie gave a very interesting account:

Moshing makes me feel like an individual, even though being in a mosh pit there are hundreds of other sweaty, greasy idiots just like myself! It gives you a kind of “high” once you come out, as if a weight has been lifted off your shoulders, even if you’re bruised and battered. (Survey response)

Several other moshers spoke of this natural high, but it is particularly interesting that Debbie said she feels like an individual through a collective act with other people. Can moshing be seen as part of creating a personal identity? I feel the answer to that is yes, and we will return to this in part 7, where the question of male and female shaping of identity through moshing is taken into consideration.

As discussed in chapter 3, the connection to the music is what drives most moshers. As Sherm asserted: “It’s the music that makes me feel, moshing is a response to it.” Of course, this is a physical response, as mosher Shaun explained; “You get the sort of glow and warmth that you feel after any sort of physical exertion, be it sport, sex or moshing.”

Although “aggression” and “release” came up several times in this survey, apart from one¹⁷, none of the respondents stated that they wanted to hurt others, which caught my attention, as this was not the case with other sources. In a previous interview, one mosher notably stated to me that to her, moshing was a socially acceptable way of kicking the crap out of others, and that her main motivation for getting into the pit, was to get into fights. Moshers of this inclination can be found at almost every concert, but they are in the minority. In this survey – apart from the previously-stated exception – there were hardly any moshers who claimed to find any joy in hurting others. Rather I found those who did not mind getting hurt themselves, a very important difference of inclination.

However, I did come across concertgoers who felt that moshers they encountered indeed appeared to be attempting to hurt the people around them, which also is not surprising. I do not dispute the fact that this type of moshing happens frequently, however it has been rare

¹⁷ This respondent wrote that to him, moshing “is a great excuse to push and beat people up in a friendly manner”.

that I have come across such moshers in my research. Informants have told me that moshers with this inclination are more frequently found in arena concerts in the US by popular nu-metal bands like Limp Bizkit and Slipknot.¹⁸

Mosher “Kills8ts”:¹⁹

There have been many times when I’ve witnessed tough-guy hardcore boys do ninja crap, hurling themselves into the people surrounding the pit, hurting them. I’ve gotten bruises that way at a lot of shows. (Survey response)

Some put the difference in action down to younger moshers not having learnt enough pit etiquette before jumping in head first, but I see it more as an indication of the pit changing. This is cause for alarm for venue security and leads to more frequent attempts at controlling the pit, or indeed banning the most potentially harmful pit-behaviour altogether.

Speaking of security issues brought up a number of more extreme points of views from fans, particularly when I asked how they felt about venues banning moshing. The most extreme reply was, “what can you do to prevent people from dying in war?” Another person replied with, “it is an accident waiting to happen.” Drummond had a more humourous take on it:

All wear big rubber and foam suits. Apart from that, dunno, just common sense on the part of the moshers, but then that’s never worked before, has it? (Survey response)

Drummond brought up a good point – the common sense of moshers. Most of the respondents brought out the unwritten rules of moshing when talking about security issues, namely that people have to look out for each other in the pit, and if you can’t take the physicality of it, then you shouldn’t be there. But as Drummond pointed out – such common sense, assumed by a lot of the moshers to be employed by themselves and others does not appear to be the same for everyone in the crowd. Thus, there is a break of connection between the ones who “get it” and the ones who don’t, which in itself can create uncomfortable (and sometimes dangerous) situations. In general, moshers are concerned about safety issues and fear getting injured.

¹⁸ One respondent in the UK reported that a friend of his had gotten knocked unconscious by one of the members of Slipknot when he backflipped from the balconies into the crowd.

¹⁹ I did not ask the real name of the respondents, and in some cases I only have their online aliases.

As mosher Aramina said; “I do worry about serious injury, all the time. And I still do it.”

And here lies a key point to moshers’ reasoning, they know the risk of their behaviour, but they choose to do it anyway: not just because they find excitement in it, but because it’s the accepted way to respond within the scene.

I’d like to end this part with accounts from two different moshers, who in a paragraph each described in a compelling manner just how important moshing is to them, I’ll begin with Richard:

Why do I mosh? Why do you breathe? You keep breathing, your blood keeps pumping, I keep moshing, likewise my blood keeps pumping. Not to mention, live music kicks in an adrenaline surge and I have to dominate the pit. It’s not a concert for me without a pit. You wake up, you eat breakfast, you go about your business... I go to concerts, I pit. (Survey response)

To Richard, moshing appeared to be such a vital part of the concerts he chose to attend that he could not imagine going if they weren’t there.

An unnamed mosher had equally strong feelings about the pit;

[Moshing] allows you to forget about anything and everything in the world for a few short hours. Moshing allows you to be yourself without any monitoring, judgment, or ridicule. It’s like taking everything inside you; happiness, frustration, anger, excitement, and compressing this all into a little bomb and setting it off. It’s fun, it’s like being on top of the world. I feel like nothing can ruin my feelings. Nothing can bring me down. I can go out and let everything out while of course taking into consideration those around me. (Survey response)

When asked of his/her best moshing experience, the last speaker responded with, “all shows are great for me.”

5. Finding a local perspective – pits in Norway

5.1. Introduction and method

In the process of writing this paper I undertook a series of in-depth interviews with individuals living in my local area, Oslo. Each subject was approached looking for a different point of view, as to among them create as a complete look at Norway as possible. None of the people interviewed were born in Oslo, but hailed from smaller places, and thus also had some understanding of the difference between music scenes in smaller places compared to Oslo, which - with its population of approximately 521,000 – is Norway's largest city. Because of its size, Oslo's alternative scene is smaller than the ones in, for example, Stockholm or London.

The subjects for interview were chosen for specific reasons, for their similarities and differences, to gain as wide an understanding as possible of the local framework towards concerts and the pits. In the interviews I would attempt to say as little as possible, asking pointed questions to discover not only *what* was answered, but *how*, as the terminology used was as interesting to me as what was said. The questions were mostly similar, but with more specific questions relevant to the subjects' background and current situations added. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Each interview forms a different type of narrative, and while the groups they belong to are interchangeable, I've assigned each of them to a point of view. For example, the members interviewed from three separate bands all have experience working at venues of different sizes, which of course is reflected in their thoughts and impressions. The male security worker also has experience from playing live with different bands from an early age. Of course, every person interviewed had a distinct interest in music, even the individual I've assigned the role of a more casual fan. This is to be expected, as every individual plays different roles in different settings, and one must also understand these people in such a way. While I've decided to focus on one role for each person, one aspect of their understanding of

the rock world, more than anything this reflects my approach to each interview and my reasoning for contacting the subjects, rather than any actual understanding of which role played is more significant for the interview subject. I find it useful to show these distinctions, not only to show my approach to each separate person, but through this to also hopefully show how the different roles weave into each other, and thus they connect and construct a more thorough local framework of mosh than previously shown. In no way do I intend this to be understood as a complete understanding of mosh in the national rock scene, but more as a glimpse of how it is seen through the eyes of my subjects in the situations they have experienced.

5.2. The English male security worker – Roy

Employed at Rockefeller Music Hall in Oslo, Roy is a black man from London and thus not the typical person in the crowd at Norwegian concerts. Nevertheless, having being born and raised in another country before moving to Oslo 14 years ago, he has an insight into the differences between the crowds in the different countries. Therefore it is fruitful to look at his perspective before going more into the impressions of the locally-born sources. His nationality is a key to why his insight is important, as he sees the local scene with outsider's eyes, not having grown up with the local scene. This "outsider's view" gives his claims of difference between the crowds in the different countries more weight than when the same view is held by someone who's mostly attended concerts in Norway, and perhaps seen a couple of bands abroad.

Roy saw his first concert at the age of 13: a goth rockabilly outfit called "24 Flight Rockers," a small band that was very special to himself and a friend at the time. Roy did not have any concept of having a first impression of a mosh pit, as he said that moshing "always happened" at the concerts he attended, with slamdancing and the crowd moving around the room. With the styles of music he listened to growing up, it would feel natural to him to get into the pit



at concerts. Roy described it as feeling a bond, a connection with the rest of the crowd, sharing a mutual love for the music. The feeling would - to him - transcend gender and race, and he referred to it as a special kind of feeling, getting aggression and rage out in the pit. To quote him, “Your heart is always racing at the end of a concert. You know you’ve had a great time, you got a lot out.”

While still in the UK, Roy did not work with organising concerts,²⁰ but he has performed with bands from an early age. A couple of years after moving to Norway, he started working with security and stage crew agencies, working at various venues like Oslo Spektrum and Rockefeller. He ended up having full employment at the Rockefeller venue, working mainly in security but also as a stagehand, setting up sound equipment and lighting. As a security worker looking out for the paying public, he has seen a variety of different concerts over the years.

Compared to the UK, Roy felt it takes a lot to get a Norwegian crowd going. In his words, “You always get the front of the house right from the stage going, but the rest of the people at the back of the room just aren’t doing anything, watching the show like they’re watching TV.” In other words, they are not partaking in the action but rather being passive spectators. His impression of the Norwegian crowd is that they are less inclined to let go and go crazy, as opposed to the London crowd, which he described as being freer. Roy did note that he knows that some people do have what he calls the “right energy,” and this is evident at the front, but it’s not a wave through the room as you can witness in venues in the UK. There’s an evident divide between the front and the back of the room, a disconnection between the people in the pit and those on the side.

To a certain extent this rings true with the experience of my other sources and the research I have done personally, but not completely. There is a level of romanticizing the crowd in Roy’s description of London, which I am sure is fitting of the type of environment he was connected to in the 80s, but is not necessarily the case anymore. The sort of behaviour one is

²⁰ Roy had in fact not had any steady work at all before moving to Norway, he was collecting unemployment benefits and busking in London.

used to in Oslo is very similar to the descriptions of the London crowd in Wendy Fonarow's article *The Spatial Organization of the Indie Music Gig* (1995), which assigns the venue into zones, in which the level of physical response from the crowd differs from zone to zone.

5.3. The female venue aid – Mona

Mona is a 24 year-old anthropology student who differs from the other interview subjects in that she has no personal mosh experience, and doesn't listen to the type of music where this form of expression would be seen fitting. Her interests lies with more introverted, quiet alternative rock. She said that she does like rock bands that have something different or experimental to them, but in general it's not her cup of tea. As an employee of Rockefeller, working the cloak room and cleanup, she has seen a number of different crowds, but through a different set of eyes from the other subjects in my research.

Mona saw a difference in the different types of crowds that visit Rockefeller, which reflected not only the music of the performers, but also the general popularity of the band in question. A band with chart popularity attracts a different sort of crowd than one that is popular mainly in subcultural environments. Take a punk band like Rancid, who performed at Rockefeller recently. Though having sold a fair amount of records over the years and being seen as an important band within their scene, Rancid are not well-known to the general public, which can be most easily explained by the lack of radio play they receive. However, their most



recent concert at Rockefeller was sold out in advance, as they have a strong fanbase. This is the kind of concert where the audience would predominantly be young males, and it would not attract too many casual concert-goers.

In contrast to that is the concerts with bands like Swedish pop/rock outfit The Cardigans, whose music receives a lot of radio play on the larger stations. They appeal to a larger demographic and have had success on the national charts.

Mona's experience has been that a band with high mainstream popularity will attract a lot more casual fans, people who in her opinion very likely don't have a strong interest in music, but who rather see the concert as part of a night out. She told me that a bigger part of the audience will stand at the back of the venue talking, and not have their full focus and attention towards the band, which can be a disturbing element in the room during the more quiet songs of the sets. This is of course not applicable to the entire crowd, as the area in front of the stage will still be comprised of the people who see themselves as fans. As Mona saw it, it is difficult to assign a specific set of behaviours to the more mainstream crowds. This is because the spectre of people who attend these concerts is a lot more varied than at, for example, the metal festival Inferno which takes place every Easter. Inferno appears to have a dress code, and rules of conduct which are very strict.

5.4. The male casual fan – Fredrik

In this setting, Fredrik represents the more casual rock fan. I don't mean to insinuate that his interest in music isn't thorough, but to my knowledge it's not quite as all-consuming as seems to have been the case with the other fans interviewed, at least not with the harder forms of rock music. Born and raised in Bærum, outside of Oslo, Fredrik's environment whilst growing up can most accurately be described as a suburban setting, white and upper middle class. As he noted, the streets of Bærum weren't particularly rough, and the type of behaviour he witnessed at concerts - during what he described as his "rebellious phase" - was



in stark contrast to the world in which he'd grown up.

During his late teens, Fredrik found an interest in punk rock with bands like The Ramones, who he saw live at the Kalvøya festival in 1995. At the concerts he went to at the time, people would slam into each other and push each other around in the pit. His experience was not just based on local understanding, as he moved to Scotland at the age of 18 and frequented a rock club there for a period of time: this club would normally have an unknown band performing every weekend.

Fredrik told me his motivation for going to concerts would always be the music: the pits didn't hold an interest to him in themselves, yet he would still frequently end up being in them. He said it was always fun at the time, but wasn't significant to him in any way. The pits were expected, and he would take part, as the music and the crowd would lead him there, but it wasn't a form of expression in itself to him. Normally he'd start off at the back of the room, and as the crowd got going he'd partake to some extent: he wouldn't be the first person to hurl himself into the crowd. He told me that there were a couple of occasions where he stepped out as he felt the intensity of the crowd was crossing over a line he didn't feel comfortable with.

There's a difference in perspective between the more casual fan, and the fans for whom this style of music and expression has grown over a number of years and developed into what - to them - feels natural and normal. Nonetheless, it's interesting to see that Fredrik, who came into the rock scene from a different background from that of the others I have interviewed, still had a firm idea that the behaviour in the pit is *the way things are supposed to be*. He did not question this type of behaviour's legitimate place in the scene, nor did he see it as violence: rather, it was part of the show. When we discussed security issues, his assessment was that there was little one could really do, apart from having venue security look after the crowd, and also that one should look after oneself. "You can't really come to a gig dressed like the Michelin man," was the way he expressed it. The element of risk is a factor to the pit which most concert-goers seem to be aware and accepting of, and Fredrik compared jumping into the pit to jumping out of a plane with a parachute: you let go of control.

5.5. The female rock fan – Hanne

26 year-old Hanne displays all the outwardly signs of a rock-oriented female, from her leather jacket to her pierced eyebrow to her strong makeup. Her looks are not deceiving. From an early age Hanne has had a strong interest in rock music, from listening to Black Sabbath on vinyl in her pre-teen years and growing into what she now describes as a love

affair with Guns 'n Roses. Hanne did not see her first mosh pit at an actual concert that she attended, which is not uncommon for a Norwegian rock fan. She said that the first pits she can remember seeing were parts of music videos on MTV in the early 90s, more specifically those of grunge bands Pearl Jam and Nirvana. Rage Against The Machine have also released a number of videos which had shaped her impression of how the pit is supposed to work, as their videos tend to be shot at concerts or protest rallies, with masses of fans shown on camera.

One of the first large concerts she attended was by American boy band New Kids On The Block, at the then newly-opened Oslo Spektrum venue. As this is a venue she's visited several times since, to see bands who differed significantly with regard to fanbases and styles of music, I asked her to elaborate on that experience. It took place in her teenage years, around the age of fifteen. She compared it to seeing shock rocker Marilyn Manson in the same venue, roughly ten years later. As she said, the pressure in the pit was strong in both crowds, but she describes the intensity at NKOTB as being of a different character. She confirmed the clichéd impression one has of the audiences of a boyband as being mostly teenage girls, the majority of them in hysterics, pushing towards the stage to get closer to the band, and screaming their way through the concert. In her impression the crowd was more out of hand at NKOTB than at the Manson concert she has attended in the same venue since. She made the interesting comment that the NKOTB audience members had no idea of how they were supposed to behave in a crowd, that it was just chaotic and very stressful. She described the performance of the band as very good and especially noted how the dancing made an impression, but said that overall it was a different sort of concert experience from the ones she usually has. It must be noted that her stance at the NKOTB was one of the outsider, as her decision to attend was based on the fact that all the girls in her class were also going.



Hanne rarely positions herself in the pit. At 5'3", she's not a very tall girl and to get into a mosh pit with a lot of guys who are much taller than she is far too stressful, she said. She gets pushed around, stepped on, and has difficulties breathing. Being small in a crowd of big people makes her feel claustrophobic, and the times she has been in the pit at the start of concerts she has pulled out quickly and gone further back in the venue. It is in the back where - as she said - she can "hopefully both see the stage and also *breathe*." Hanne has never had any interest in entering the pit area for any reason apart from being closer to the stage. As soon as it gets too crowded or moshing starts happening, she gets out. Nonetheless, she did not feel that the mosh pit is a disturbing factor at a concert, as long as she isn't in it herself. When she attends rock concerts, she expects moshing to occur. She would find it boring if people were just standing still, watching the band. When we discussed the 2004 Øya festival and their sign banning crowdsurfing, she said she wasn't in favour of overly strict regulations imposed on crowd behaviour like that. In her opinion, people should be able to use their own common sense when entering into such situations. However, she also notes that you can't really expect too much of people, as "the majority are idiots."

Although I found the last comment amusing, it nevertheless brings up the question of common sense in the pit, if there is in fact such a thing. I've talked before about the unwritten rules of the pit, but larger concerts and outdoor festivals attract a fair number of more casual concert goers, who perhaps aren't as familiar with these unwritten rules. Having that in mind, it is wise of organisers to take a more active stance on pit behaviour, to be able to stop a situation before it gets completely out of control. I question why the finger is being pointed at crowdsurfing, but suspect it is because that this activity is easier to spot, and thus stop.

5.6. The male fan – Markus

Markus is a 27 year-old male who goes to concerts about once a month, and attends the Roskilde festival every summer. I asked him what his first impressions of moshing were, and like Hanne he said he probably first saw it on MTV, in the 80s metal or the 90s grunge videos. The first place he saw a mosh-like pit was at a hip hop jam, where a group of boys

formed a circle in which they ran around and pushed into each other, just like in a circle pit from the hardcore punk scene. He referred to these hip hop circle pits as “breakpits.”

If Markus enjoys himself at a concert he will end up in the pit, jumping and shouting. As opposed to Hanne, he never starts off near the front of the stage. Instead, he will be located further to the back of the room, and if he’s having a good concert experience, he will end up in the pit. A good pit experience to him has the feel of having no restraints; it is to just go a little crazy, and not really care about the consequences. Afterwards he feels really tired, but filled with adrenaline, and it’s good to just sit down and relax with a beer. He wouldn’t say it is like coming down in the negative sense: he said it’s a wonderful feeling.



I asked Markus about differences between a festival audience and a local venue audience. His impression is that the audience is more varied at a festival; the concerts won’t attract just the fans. That is part of the charm of festivals: seeing a number of unknown bands. Whilst Markus sees a lot of bands back home that are new to him, it’s different at a festival. You don’t get geared up as much in advance, as you see so many different performances during a festival that you’re filled with impressions from them all. Plus the bands in themselves aren’t the only factor which draws people to festivals. Markus spoke of a special kind of feeling and sense of community at Roskilde, which attracts him in a different way.

One of Markus’ favourite bands is the Finnish metal band Nightwish, who recently have attracted a wide following in Norway. During 2004, they played three sold-out shows in a row at the Rockefeller venue, and their latest album *Once* topped the sales charts. Markus had seen them several times, and even went to Finland to the release party for the most recent album. He said he’s happy for the band for becoming so successful, but at the same time he also dislikes the type of crowds the band now attracts. The difference between seeing the band in 2003 and 2004 - in the same venue - was significant, despite the concerts being sold out on both tours. The band now has a more varied following, which is reflected in the

behaviour seen at the last concert Markus attended. At this concert, he said he could tell that there were a lot of new fans attending, who were viewing the band as a much bigger deal than he was, and there were more fans jumping and screaming. At the concert in Finland, filled with hardcore fans, the public was more laid-back.

5.7. The frequent concert attendee – Truls

An “old” punk from Moss, 35 year-old Truls has gone to more gigs than anyone else I have come across. In general he says he goes to about 50 concerts every year, and at one point he went to 2-3 concerts every week. Truls’ interest in music stretches far beyond the norm, and he tells me that he collects his ticket stubs. It was his older sister who introduced him to music, and she brought him along to the first live concert he saw at age 11. The band performing was a local punk band called Konstant Anfall.

Due to age restrictions at a lot of concerts, he didn’t see too many bands before the age of 18, but as soon as he reached the legal drinking age he started going to concerts frequently. He went mostly to local clubs in Moss, but he would also travel to Oslo to see bigger concerts there. Truls told me of a club in Moss called Kråkerei, where he saw a number of concerts when he was living there. The bands he would go to see were usually playing hardcore, punk or rock, and the majority were Norwegian bands. The crowd would be active in the pit, fairly typical for the type of hardcore punk that was popular at the time, both melodic and fast in tempo – perfect for rocking out, as he says. He would frequently see slamdancing, jumping and pogoing in the local clubs. The bands wouldn’t always be great, but it didn’t matter as much if they had the right energy.

Truls used to move a lot at concerts; he described it as workout sessions. He hated all kinds of jogging and other



kinds of exercise, and this was his only way of working out. He'd get exhausted from pogoing and moving throughout a whole concert, but if he heard a band he liked he'd get chills down his spine and there was no stopping him – the music would give him the energy he needed. He could feel the taste of blood in his mouth, but would still go on. If he had been drinking, moving in the pit would sober him up again and all he'd want to drink afterwards would be water: beer didn't taste nice to him after a session in the pit. He remembered seeing older fans standing around with their beers and promised himself that he wouldn't turn into a boring old rocker like them, which naturally happened nonetheless as he got older and his body no longer contained the same the energy level. He still enters the pit every now and then, but said it's too much of a struggle for him. Also, he doesn't want to get hit in the face by someone else's boots, which is something he didn't worry about at all when he was younger.

Unlike Hanne and Markus, Truls saw his first pit at a concert and not on television. As we were discussing the different ways of being taught pit rules, he noted that the ones who first see moshing on MTV might see it as a part of the marketing package, and that moshing as such became a part of a larger trend wave, which I agree with. He prefers that fans learn moshing from the basics as he says, so that they'll understand the dynamics of the pit: where it came from and why it is even there in the first place. There might be a misunderstanding by the MTV viewers that all concerts within a certain genre are supposed to have mosh pits, but in Truls' opinion that is not the case. A pit will work differently with different bands: the music played should shape the behaviour of the pit, and one should be able to read from the band what kind of reactions they want from the crowd. For example, previously a lot of the bands would encourage stagediving, but it is less common now. Truls' observation was that the crowds have changed since his first gig experiences. In the early 80s Oslo was hungry for good bands and it was easier to get a crowd going. Now, he says, the crowds appear to be a lot more blasé, and it takes a lot from a band to really fire up the local crowd. This corresponds with Roy's observation of the local crowd, but I still think it's not as much a local occurrence as Roy appeared to think. As far as I have been told by interview subjects from both the UK and the US, a similar change is also happening in the crowds there.

5.8. The frontman – Anders from Zection8

26 year-old Anders works for the Garage club and venue, and is the lead singer of metal band Zection8, a currently unsigned band. Anders is a charismatic front figure who interacts well with the crowd, a skill that helped the band win a local battle of the bands contest called “Fight Club” in 2003. This was a contest in which the audience voted for their favourites each night until a winner was chosen and received prize money and a bottle of scotch.

As a front man, Anders works more directly with the crowd than the other musicians interviewed. He’s dependant on the crowd when he is on stage, and their feedback will always affect his performance. It inspires him and fires him up when the crowd reacts positively, but on the other hand little or no response will make him work even harder for their attention. It isn’t necessarily a better experience for him to play to people who are clearly enjoying themselves, as he says it is a lot more fulfilling to him when he manages to turn people around during the concert. If an attendee goes from standing with his arms crossed at the first number to rocking out at the end, Anders feels as if he’s succeeded, like he’s won a struggle.

Hailing from the west coast of Norway near Bergen, Anders has played for audiences and also attended several concerts in both places. In Bergen, he said, the available number of concerts on any given week is always less than in Oslo, which has an impact on the audience. In Bergen the music interests tend to be broader, extending over more genres, while in Oslo there is a tendency to go deeper into one genre and stick to it. In that sense, he feels that the Bergen audience is more open to new acts.



I asked him if he ever saw people dancing at concerts, and got a firm “no” as a reply. He said that some might attempt to dance in a clumsy manner, and these are people who don’t normally dance. What he sees he described as a more *liberating* form of dance, where people “let go.”

Reflecting over the question, he said that it all depends on what you define as dance, and the movements he sees aren't just by one person, there's a pattern in how people move. He described it as more than dance, as 'you scream as you move', and in a way take part in the performance, albeit indirectly. From this line of reasoning, he began talking about the *absolute concert experience*, which for many is letting go of the normal self-control and being a part of the experience, instead of being a passive bystander: it is to truly experience something real that is unlike your ordinary life. He spoke of it as teenage behaviour, and didn't mean that in a negative sense, but rather that the youthfulness of the teenage years is relived through music, with less of the biased approach that one tends to develop as one matures..

5.9. The Garage rock band – Morten and Simen from The Mormones

The Mormones is a duo from Lillehammer, a band comprised of just a drummer and a bassist, which still manages to create a sound more powerful than bands with twice as many members, or more. Their music is reminiscent of bands like Mötörhead and The Ramones. The two members grew up listening to music and playing with different projects from an early age.

Sometimes the local crowd needs a push to get going, and The Mormones are good at encouraging their crowds. At one of the concerts I've seen them perform, the audience was relatively calm through most of the concert, until the encore, when the band informed their audience that if they wanted to come up on stage and dance, they were welcome to do so. A guy jumped up on stage as soon as the next song started, took his flip-flops off and hurled himself into the crowd. The crowd was taken by surprise and from where I was standing it looked like he fell straight to the floor. This did not discourage him, as he jumped right back up on stage to repeat the dive, and was successfully caught, before the first mosh pit of the night broke loose. What was especially interesting to see was the way the women in the crowd responded to this: almost all the girls who were standing in the area in front of the

stage immediately withdrew to the sides, leaving the boys and one or two girls to jump around.



When on stage, the band tends to be more focused on their own performance than on how the crowd is reacting. Simen, the drummer, told me that he barely even sees the audience, which is understandable considering that their songs tend to be very high tempo, and rarely last past longer than two minutes.

The band have noticed some incidents, but said that they are so focused on their performance that they - in some sense - become blind to the audience. They said they mostly play for their own pleasure, but do feel a high when those in the crowd are enjoying themselves, and when there's dancing and stagediving.

What was interesting in interviewing The Mormones was that they made a distinction between dance and violence at concerts, which few of the other subjects made. They told me that they didn't appreciate violent pits at concerts. They like it when people move around and have a good time, but they have seen people end up having fights in the pit, which is something they don't approve of. They differentiate between people who move because of the music, and those who push into people for pushing's own sake. However at the same time they told me they like it when a lot of people are dancing, stagediving and such. They also like people coming up on stage with them, as long as those people don't disrupt their performance or tamper with their equipment. That The Mormones point out a difference between aggressive behaviour and dancing indicates to me a wider understanding of the word "dance" compared, for example, to Truls; although they may be talking about the same type of behaviour they perceive it as something else.

5.10. The Industrial rock band – Glenn and Steinar from Zensor

Zensor is from a different part of the underground; their industrial rock music with programmed rhythms along with full band setup is darker and more intense, with elements from electronica and metal. I talked to the guitarist Glenn and bassist Steinar, both of whom have worked at the John Dee venue, and we discussed their experiences with working at a venue alongside playing in a band.

Their experiences with the crowds at Rockefeller Music Hall are similar to the ones described by Mona and Roy; they see a clear difference between the mainstream concerts and the ones more connected with the underground scenes. In their view, the bigger acts draw more people who aren't genuinely interested in music. These are people who do not, in their words, have a concept of how one should behave when seeing a band live. This group of people also tend to drink significantly more, and sees the concert more as a part of a night out, compared to the group which is genuinely interested in the music. This is a generalization that a lot of people who see themselves as "proper" music fans make, and whilst the stereotypes of music fans and non-music fans fit very few people, there is an element of truth to it. The idea is that the show affects the fans who see themselves as genuine more than it does the people who are there for just a fun night, as the latter's sense of fun and entertainment isn't affected by the former. The former, on the other hand, feel the behaviour of the "less genuine" fans is disturbing, and can make their nights less than satisfactory. As the members of Zensor are part of the underground scene, their view of the mainstream audience is tinted by this understanding, which the majority of the self-proclaimed "real" fans of music share.



The music of Zensor is darker and perhaps less accessible than the music of Zection 8 and The Mormons. It is rough but melodic, a more intense, introverted form of aggression. Glenn proclaimed that the whole

point of being in a band for him was the channelling of aggression through music, and if he were in a jazz band where he would sit still and play for hours he would simply go insane. He said music is a very physical thing to him, and he has to act out the aggression with his instrument. The aggression in the music and the behaviour of the band is echoed - as described in detail in part 3 - in the behaviour of the audience. Both band members emphasized that the connection between performer and audience is what makes live concerts special: the stronger the connection is, the more “magical” the performance is. At the same time, the members of the audience are affected by each other. Glenn told of concerts where he’d wanted to be “inside the music,” but felt held back when people around him were acting in a more reserved manner. According to almost every person I’ve interviewed, this reserved manner is typical of the local audience. The Norwegian audience is seen as more reserved by bands and fans alike, locally born and raised and as well as visiting. It is seen as somewhat embarrassing to let yourself go and move freely at concerts, which is very frustrating to the people who wish the crowd were holding back less. The exceptions to the rule appear to be when people are under the influence of alcohol, and at outdoor festivals. Glenn remembered watching pop singer Robbie Williams at Roskilde. He went to the concert expecting to laugh at Williams, but to his surprise he, and everyone else there, was completely blown away: by the end of the concert everyone were bouncing around. It was impossible not to, he said, you felt like a fool if you were standing still. Needless to say, prior to the concert at Roskilde, Glenn would not even have considered going to see Williams in concert, had Williams visited Norway.

5.11. The Roskilde accident and security issues

The previously-mentioned tragedy at the Roskilde festival in 2000, when nine fans were crushed to death in front of the largest stage at the festival during the Pearl Jam performance was a topic of discussion with all my interview subjects. No matter if they were there or not, it left a strong impression on everyone when it happened, and it is still talked about.

Mona was in the crowd at the beginning of the concert, but the pressure in the crowd was too much for her to take, and she left the area, despite being a fan of the band. She heard her friends tell of people covered in blood being pulled out of the crowd, filmed by the cameras and shown on the big screens. It was raining that night, and Truls was supposed to meet a friend by the mixing deck, but the rain made him reconsider. He went back to the tent and fell asleep, only to learn the next day what had happened. Anders, however, was in the crowd with a friend. They started off far back, and as the band were playing, they made their way deeper into the crowd until they saw on the big screen what was happening, which stopped them. Neither of them were injured, but other friends of his, who were further up in the crowd, were: one of these friends broke his arm. Markus was near the front on the side, and luckily managed to pull himself out of the crowd before it got out of hand.

Markus claimed the accident had nothing to do with moshing or general pit behaviour, and from the descriptions I've read in the media and stories I've heard, it seems he might be right. The Roskilde accident was a combination of a lot of things simultaneously going wrong: too many people were attempting to push their way to the front of the crowd, and the soil was slippery because of the rain. Thus, a chain reaction occurred, with people unable to get back on their feet once they'd fallen. The area in front of the largest stage also had a number of metal bars reaching up to about waist height placed throughout the pit, and if you got stuck pushed into one of those, it was impossible to get anywhere. Combined with this was a lack of communication between the band and the security, making it difficult to place a finger on what precisely was the cause. Rumour also has it that parts of the security team were under the influence of alcohol. The festival denied it, but media reports featured statements from guards who claimed that they all had access to cheap alcohol, a perk of working at the festival, and that they themselves had been drinking that night.

Truls said that the Roskilde tragedy was an accident waiting to happen, and it came as no surprise to him. He's seen several dangerous situations where his own experiences and pit technique have helped him stay on his feet. The area in front of the largest stage also had a number of metal bars reaching up to about waist height placed throughout the pit, and if you got stuck pushed into one of those, it was impossible to get anywhere.



Truls was firm in his assessment that there's always a risk in going to larger concerts, and if one wants to be close to the stage, one has to be ready to take that risk. Nonetheless, security at venues and festivals can aid in diminishing that risk, if not remove it completely. After the accident, several changes were made at the Roskilde festival to assure such an

incident would not happen again. Along with new constructions for parting the crowd, members of the security team are now to patrol inside the crowd itself to make sure they catch potentially dangerous situations before they get out of hand. The pit area is now controlled with guards and a lighting system; if the light turns red they will not allow more people to enter the pit.

Accidents of this magnitude are very rare, and it sent shockwaves through the rock community. Hanne did not attend Roskilde, but seeing the footage on television made a strong impression on her. For a while after the accident, she felt that the audiences at concerts of larger scale were calmer in response to the danger which was now so evident to everyone. The effect has diminished now, but as the call for better security appears to have been sufficiently answered by organisers in Scandinavia, nothing of this scope has taken place since. While I feel it is impossible to ensure that no one will ever be crushed to death at a concert again, the risk of now seems very low.

However, the way a crowd gets out of control has more to do with size than with moshing, and I am not aware of any deaths which are directly connected to the act of moshing. Injuries in the pit are common, but the most serious I've heard of were a couple of broken bones and perhaps a concussion. Despite the tragic events at the Roskilde festival, I am still convinced that, although engaging in mosh pit behaviour is a hazardous endeavour, it is not dangerous to the degree that was presented after the Roskilde accident.

6. Exploring dance and rave – mosh as dance

As I have already claimed within these pages, an important point to consider is how moshing is related to dance. In the part that follows I will go into how this can be understood in relation to use of body, and expression with the use of body. In my exploration of what dance is, I will also turn to rave culture, as a source of comparing subcultural environments which use the body in a form of dance that is different from what has previously been understood as dance.

Judith Lynn Hanna defines dance in *To Dance is Human* (1987) from a range of perspectives, the commonsensical definition of movement to music set aside:

We can view dance from a number of different perspectives. Dance is *physical* behavior: the human body releases energy through muscular responses to stimuli received by the brain. Movement, organized energy, is the essence of dance. The body or its parts contract and release, flex and extend, gesture and move from one place to another. The action, or existential flow, of dancing is inseparable from the dancer: the creator and instrument of dance are one. Dance is cultural behavior: a people's values, attitudes, and beliefs partially determine the conceptualisation of dance as well as its physical production, style, structure, content, and performance. (Hanna, 1987: 3)

As dance is a cultural behaviour, different cultures will have a different understanding of dance. As the different cultures have different music and ideals, as such they will also have different ideas of what dance is, and what its meanings are. She makes a point of the symbolic meaning of dance:

“Dance is a physical instrument or symbol for feeling and/or thought and is sometimes a more effective medium than verbal language in revealing needs and desires or masking true intent. Because humans are multisensory, they act and watch or feel more often than they verbalize and listen. The dance medium often comes into play where there is a lack of verbal expression. Movements in dance become standardized and patterned symbols, and members of a society may understand that these symbols are intended to represent experiences in the external and psychic world”. (Hanna, 1987: 4).

So what is dance? It is physical behaviour, non-verbal communication, and cultural behaviour, sometimes more effective in creating a statement than verbal language. It is not merely moving one's body to music: the underlining reasoning for why we move the way we do is set by clear rules.

Says Simon Frith in *Performing Rites* :

The relationship of “listening” to music and “moving” to music is, in short, a matter of convention, as is what sort of movement to make; even a spontaneous response has to be coded as “spontaneous.” (...) Dancing is to walking, one might say, as singing is to talking. When dancing we subject our body movements to musical rules (we are less free than when we walk), and yet in our very self-consciousness we seem to reveal more clearly our physical sense of our selves; we are more self-expressive. (Frith, 1996: 220)

Our understanding of what constitutes dance is culturally based. And as such our idea of dance is not a fixed ideal; dance changes as our society changes, and as thus also reflects how we feel about displaying our bodies.

Many ways in which dancing was considered vulgar only a few decades ago are now treated with a shrug by the majority in western society. The film *Dirty Dancing* (starring Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey) released in the mid-eighties, is an indication of this. Set in the fifties, this film portrays a young seemingly-innocent girl as she encounters teenagers from a different background, who dance in a style she is not familiar with. The film is interesting in its portrayal of the split between the taught formal dances, with defined rules and steps, and their contrast with the perceived immorality of the gyrating dancing of the underground community: a dance that is so sexual in tone and movement that it resembles couples having



sex upright, fully dressed. The film's lead character, whose nickname “Baby” emphasizes her innocence, discovers not only a different way of moving in dance, but also in life. As the film progresses she acknowledges for the first time her own desires, as she becomes aware of her sexuality. In the end the newer form of body movement triumphs over the dances now seen

as passé: a new way of moving and of presenting oneself sexually through body movement becomes, at the film's end, apparently instantly acceptable to all in attendance. It is as if the dance's validity has been proven by the strength of the two main characters' emotions. While a reference to *Dirty Dancing* may seem out of place in a discussion of the mosh pit, the point I am trying to make with this reference is that the way in which we view what dance is has changed very much since the early days of rock music, and our perspective will continue to change.

To further argue this point I would like to turn to the work of Helen Thomas, in *Dance, Modernity and Culture – Explorations in the Sociology of Dance*. In this work, she refers to dance as an “encoded system which inheres particular stylistic qualities” (Thomas, 1995: 28). Although Thomas's study is related to American modern dance, her work can be applied here:

As a consciously articulated movement form American modern dance shares certain important variables with everyday movement. Both have the same substance, movement created in time and space, in both forms, the body is the medium of expression. Modern dance, however, is readily recognisable as an encoded system. It has particular stylistic qualities that are understandable as dance. (Thomas, 1995: 8)

In a sense, moshing can be understood in a very similar way to everyday movement. Mosh is also movement created in time and space, using the body as the medium of expression, and also recognisable as an encoded system. More than anything mosh is a distinctive way of using the body in a form of expression, but expressing something different, shaped by the environment in which the behaviour was born.

Thomas makes a point of dance being a way of coping with aggression;

Dance is *psychological*, involving cognitive and emotional experiences affected by and affecting an individual's personal and group life. Thus dance serves as a means of knowing and coping with socially induced tensions and aggressive feelings. (Thomas, 1995: 4)

As punk rock was very aggressive and rebellious in tone, expressing a desire to be set apart from the mainstream, likewise were the movements of the fans. Although there may be no real aggression in the pit, rather an illusion and idea of rebellion, this connection with dance does not seem far-fetched to me. My main point is that the way in which a person dances

changes with different music, and such a change is also present in the pit: differences in movement are noticeable within different subgenres of punk, rock and metal, as shown in part 3.

If one accepts the argument of moshing understood as a form of dance, the next step further - to the rave party - is not a difficult one. Mosh pits and rave parties are both parts of popular culture, understood as radically different by participants, but in both environments there exists an understanding of the



importance of the bodily response to the music of choice. This rings true for all forms of popular music. As Stan Hawkins writes in the first chapter of *Settling the pop score*:

The appeal of the sound in pop is derived directly from the music's immediate *effect* on the body. For example, in dance-based genres, how the pulse, the groove, the joy of repetition drives the music is what induces immediate physical and aesthetic response. Yet, to be sure, the pop experience is also affiliated to sensations based on learned listening experiences that adhere to bodily movement (Hawkins, 2002: 29).

Accordingly, mosh pits and rave parties constitute parts of two different subcultural environments, which have more in common than what may be evident initially. To further this point of view, it is necessary to examine rave further.

According to *Key Concepts in Popular Music* by Roy Shuker,

(Raves) grew out of semi-legal warehouse parties organized by young entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom and United States in the late 1980s (...) Rave culture is the general term applied to the phenomenon of raves, and the social practices which accompany them, including the use of the drug ecstasy, which provoked a (justifiable?) moral panic in the United Kingdom, and a number of other countries (e.g. Australia), during the mid- to late 1990s. The main music at raves is techno and other variants of dance-music. (Shuker, 1998: 250).

When one takes rave parties into account, perhaps the first thing that springs to mind is the use of drugs, MDMA (ecstasy) in particular. And not without good reason: the use of drugs at rave parties is known to have been frequent, and some have considered rave culture to be a

drug culture, in which the music came second. To some ravers, this may be a reality. Nevertheless, the main subject of this discussion is dance, and therefore I will not discuss at length the drug use of the participants at a rave party.

While the influence of drugs is not irrelevant to how the experience of a rave party is shaped and experienced by the participants, I feel this element of rave parties has been stressed more than enough in the past through extensive media coverage and thorough research, and holds less relevance for what I am trying to argue in this paper. What is most interesting to me is what dancers experience, rather than what might happen to them chemically. To what extent does the use of drugs strengthen the experience for the ravers?

Many ravers report of a natural “high” that is strongly felt, experienced through dancing, without the use of drugs. Simon Reynolds makes the following statement about the use of drugs, in the book *Generation Ecstasy*:

Ecstasy was a miracle cure for the English disease of emotional constipation, reserve, inhibition. Because of the mingling and fraternization the drug catalysed, the living death of the eighties – characterized by social atomisation and the Thatcher-inculcated work ethic – seemed to be coming to an abrupt end. (Reynolds, 1999:65).

In other words, the use of drugs is not something to dismiss as unimportant when attempting to understand rave culture, but in comparison to the mosh pit it is less relevant. What is far more relevant in the comparison I’m attempting is the similar uses of the body and the way in which music is understood. Although the bodily connection to music in rave culture may, to some extent, be fuelled by the use of drugs, it is not true that all participants at a rave party are under the influence of drugs. Likewise it is not true that all moshers are drinking alcohol, even if both instances are rather common. That said, the use of drugs is as widespread with rock fans as it is with ravers, even if the use of drugs in relation to being in the mosh pit is not a subject that has appeared often in my research.²¹

²¹ Whilst drug use is frequent amongst rock fans, I have not come across any who see drugs as a way of enhancing their pit experiences, and as such I have decided to not factor in use of drugs in relation to the pit.

A consideration of the music of the rave is vital: in that it is differentiated from the rock scene in a significant way, and, as I am arguing, various forms of music result in differences in the bodily reactions. Rave and house music are produced with the aid of samplers, computers and synthesizers, with high tempo and a firm beat, layers of synthesizers creating a larger sound, expanding and detracting throughout the track to create peaks. While the sound is very different, what is most different from rock music is the lack of song form. In the rock scene, one is accustomed to songs, with verses and choruses. However, more often than not, in house or rave music one will not find tracks that can be considered as songs under this definition at all. Tracks often contain vocal parts, but the verse/chorus form of song one tends to find frequently in popular music is rarer to come across in rave.²²

The rock crowd often relies on familiarity of the music to properly get into the spirit, moving especially enthusiastically to songs considered hits. At a rave party the music is no less important, but familiarity with the individual songs does not come as strongly into play. The music is known by its devotion to the beat, its use of rhythm almost as a hypnotic tool. Repetition and variation are used as elements of dynamics, driving the piece of music and the crowd. Also, a rock concert is usually over and done with in an hour or two; whereas the rave, on the other hand, is designed to last all night, into the early hours of the morning. This creates a difference in dynamics of the performance: on the one hand working up to a peak at the end of a concert, on the other hand having several smaller peaks throughout the night,



with the desire of making it last being an underlying principle for the rave DJs.

One of the things the two music scenes have in common is the *show* of it all, albeit with a somewhat different focus. While at a rock concert the focus and show will be concentrated to the stage, at a rave party

²² While house has gone in a commercial direction and is now considered more radio-friendly and commercial than hard rock, it is not this commercial wave of electronica I am referring to, but rather the music played at rave parties, which was music you were likely to never hear again.

the show is all around you. Often the music is controlled by a faceless DJ, who is sometimes hidden in a DJ booth in the dark (although some DJs are known to put on quite a show). The DJ is sometimes referred to as a shaman, a priest, a channeler of energy, and the dancing as a ritual act. Simon Reynolds refers to the DJ-as-shaman when talking about Larry Levan, who was a pioneer in Chicago house music:

“Levan was one of the very first examples of the DJ-as-shaman, a techno-mystic who developed a science of total sound in order to create spiritual experiences for his followers. Working in tandem with engineer Richard Long, he custom-built the Garage’s sound system, developing his own speakers and special low-end-intensive subwoofer known as Larry’s Horn. Later, during his all-night DJ-ing stints he would progressively upgrade the cartridges on his three turntables so that the sensory experience would peak around 5 AM. During the week, he would spend hours adjusting the positioning of speakers and making sure the sound was physically overwhelming yet crystal clear. Garage veterans testify that the sheer sonic impact of the system seemed to wreak submolecular changes in the body” (Reynolds, 1999:35).

Visual effects are an important part of the show. Raves have light shows that are the envy of rock bands everywhere, with lights throughout the room, and commonly a lot of strobe lighting. The show extends to the participants, who dress up in spectacular outfits, some with materials which glow in the dark. Use of glow sticks and whistles is also widely popular. As a raver, you are surrounded by the show, and you yourself are the show. Instead of watching music being played, you are overwhelmed by it, being almost inside the music itself; your space on the dance floor can appear like a cocoon when you close your eyes, being alone in a gigantic ball of music. It is sometimes so loud that you cannot hear anything around you apart from the music, thus furthering this illusion of sound as a world you can actually enter and be inside.

I have seen rave described as the ultimate subjective experience, and within this wave of music such an experience is seemingly possible. On the dance floor you can be perfectly content not interacting with anyone, just dancing and treasuring the experience by yourself. Another reason why it is described in this manner is because for every dancer the experience is completely different. Adding to this, an important ingredient is the feeling of connection with other dancers, even if they are total strangers. People at a rave call this feeling of connection “The Vibe,” a feeling or attitude that cannot properly be expressed in words but

appears to be commonly felt throughout the community. It's this shared feeling of "The Vibe" that connects the actors together in music and dancing. It is difficult to attempt to explain what "The Vibe" involves, but it has been described as something of a religious experience from a number of people. A raver I've communicated with describes the feeling as magical. As she said, the subtext of a rave for her could be described this way: "Welcome to the underworld where peace and love exists." Another raver describes his experience this way:

Rave has everything to do with music and dancing and people. The music and the lights and the dancing establish the vibe which is conducive to the shared experience, the empathy. (Hyperreal)

Several ravers have stated that they have come out of the experience changed. To quote from one of the testimonials I've come across (quotes in this part are all from the online raver community Hyperreal, a website containing archives of posts to the internet made by ravers in the 90s, sorted into different categories.):

Before, when I used to go to dances I didn't DANCE, I would just drink or look at women etc, now I dance and it makes sense. (Hyperreal)

Stan Hawkins explains how the beat of the music can move the dancer into such a state of excitement:

Almost as if depersonalized in its aesthetic intention, the sublime effect of the beat is to mechanize the dancer into a collective entity which often involves the reconstruction of identities through carnivalesque display. In this sense, the idiomatic gestures of house convey a religious and political sense of purpose for its congregations. Hence, a notion of togetherness is mediated through the vitality of musical style which becomes an embodiment of dancefloor aesthetics. (Hawkins, 2003. 98)

Another raver illustrates his experience in this way:

I have just found for me that music alone is enough to lift me to a higher plateau. I get myself so worked into the beat, I end up half hypnotized. At times I have gotten so lost, that my friends would swear that I was on something. It is an awesome feeling to get into this state and then feel the endorphins and adrenalin racing through your system. My body feels so alive and full of energy. I can feel my nerves just reaching out, grabbing hold of the universe and carrying me away. The ride is as much driven by you as it is your surroundings and environment. (Hyperreal)

Several ravers talk about achieving this form of natural high while dancing, through connecting with music. Comparing statements like these to the ones from moshers as presented in part 4, the feelings described have a great deal in common.

The rave scene is vividly described in the book *The Sex Revolts* by Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, which confirms the assessments of individual ravers at Hyperreal:

Dancers feel connected together as a giant, polymorphously perverse, collective organism; at the same time, their individual bodies seem to interface directly with the sound-system, their nervous systems plugged into the music's circuitry. (Reynolds/Press, 1995: 106).

The same part of the book also compares the rave to an orgasmatron: "a system for generating euphoria and excitement out of nothing, and for no good reason." Make no mistake about it – it is not the male orgasm one is comparing the rave party with. While the rock concert may end in a powerful climax at the end, a rave party is meant to endure, to have several climaxes all the way through, and still keep going, until you are exhausted with pleasure.

An element that parts the two cultures is located in the main focus of attention during the events. At a rock concert, the main reason for attending is to see a band perform live. The performing act is the most important factor; the experiences surrounding it, moshing included, just add to the package of the event rather than being the focal point of the experience. The main focus of attention is the band you have come to see. Of course, there are moshers who go to concerts just to mosh, and tend to only go to concerts where they know there will be a mosh pit, but this is not the case for the majority of people who mosh.

With rave parties, there is a slight change in perspective. Although different DJs draw fans to events they spin at, the fans' focus isn't directed towards the person behind the decks in the same manner that rock fans are focused on the performers on stage.

To quote a raver discussing the same point:

If it were only about music and nothing else then I would buy records and take them to the public library and sit myself in one of those little cubicles with a record player and headphones and I would isolate myself from the rest of the world so I could

concentrate on the music and nothing else. If it were only about music and dancing then I would steal the record player and take it to my secret hideout and dance the night away all by my lonesome. (...) But the main thing that keeps me coming back for more is that I enjoy the company of all these incredible people. When I stop finding these people - that is the day I will just sit at home and listen to the music. (Hyperreal)

This raver is less driven by the music than by the satisfaction he finds with connecting with other guests at the parties. Although the music is important to him, it in itself is not what draws him to attend. But although that's *his* main reason for attending, this is not the case generally for ravers, who are equally driven by their love of the music as the rock fans are.

Returning to dance and the way I have presented it so far, this view of bodily movement is where I most easily see a strong connection between the raver and the mosher, even if the two communities most likely would rather bend over backwards than admit to any sort of common ground. The differences in the music and styles do indeed result in different forms of bodily expression, but I still remain strong in the belief that the reasons for engaging in such behaviours are very similar: to subjectively experience music in a much stronger way. The way of achieving such a connection with the music differs between the two communities, as does the music. However, the feeling of being a part of the music and a part of the show, forming a stronger connection with the music itself, the release of stress and tension through letting oneself go – these things they do have in common.



Also similar – as a result of the bodily experience and the strength of emotion felt while dancing the night away at a rave party or throwing yourself into the pit – is the feeling of connection within the community. While one's experience is subjective (dancing alone in a crowd or moshing, trying to stay on your feet) there is a degree of contentment in being

connected to the music. In this way, the experience yields a strong feeling of joy and understanding, something that one shares with other members of the crowd. As mentioned earlier, ravers express feelings of connection even with total strangers, times when it feels completely natural to put their arms around people they have yet to speak to. A mosher also feels the connection while in the crowd: you share your space with the people around you, and there's a feeling of being 'in this together;' everyone is there for the same reason, to enjoy great music and have a good time.

A raver described an incident that occurred at a party in Vancouver:

I was swimming through the music across the dance floor, (...) when I ran across a couple of friends on the floor, and proceeded to give them both a hug. We were all trancing pretty heavily, and as I stood with my arms around my two buddies, looking at the ground, I felt that familiar rush of good vibes coming on. All of a sudden, I looked up and found that we were surrounded by 20-30 other people, all hugging in on us, creating a huge circle, the most gigantic hug I have ever been in, and everyone just pouring their love and good vibes, not only into the hug, but out into the rest of the party, and the rest of the world as well. (Hyperreal)

He then proceeded to describe how this turned into a dancing circle, which is when everyone lets go at the same time when there is a shift in the music: the dancers let their bodies explode into motion as the music does. This beautiful image sounds somewhat like a mosh pit without the factor of violence. In fact, it can without difficulty be compared to what is referred to as a circle pit, which is described in detail in Joe Ambrose's book:

"(...) circle pits, extraordinary expressions of solidarity in front of hardcore bands. A circle pit involves a large number of people – it needs a decent crowd – forming and running around in a huge circle, holding on to one another to maintain balance. The circle turns faster and faster as the music picks up speed. Circle pits are uniquely good humoured, a source of tender youthful joy to the participants, and are often instigated by bands when they see things getting a little tight or sour in the pit." (Ambrose, 2001:7)

I must point out that – while one can draw parallels between the two, as I've tried to show – I am in no way claiming that rave parties and mosh pits are deeply related to each other. This is not my intention. Alternatively, I do believe that the reasons for seeking out experiences like moshing and all-night raving are similar, and it is these reasons that are important in my further discussion.

The choice of what sort of event one enters into lies mostly in the personality of the individual. To have an experience that renders an effect of significant weight, one must find a setting that is right for one's individual needs and desire. Also, how one chooses to find the experiences is of less relevance than the urge to have one, which is where a raver and a mosher appear to have common ground. What sort of experience one seeks out is connected to a sense of personal identity. Showing affiliation with events considered out of the norm, to some extent, displays affiliation with the frame of mind inherent in the group dynamics of each scene. It is these considerations that are raised in the following discussion.

7. Identity, rebellion and gender in the pit

I have already touched briefly upon the mosh pit as a part of forming a sense of personal identity within the rock scene; this theory will be developed further in this part. To begin with, I will attempt to tackle the question of identity construction in the pit, closely tied to an examination of the ideal of rebellion in the subcultural scene in which moshing was born. I will use the aid of identity theory from psychology, combined with musical identity theory, as presented in *Musical Identity*, a collaborative work by musicologists and psychologists. Here I also draw in points from William Tsitsos' article on slamdancing and rebellion. This part is mostly focused on the male part of the crowd, and part 7.2 explores the role of the female in the pit, with references to works by Mavis Bayton and Judith Halberstam. Through Halberstam and her work on female masculinity, I will move into a case study of a mosher whose story differs from the majority, and is a more extreme example of creation of male masculinity through participation in the pit.

7.1. Rebellion and identity



In many instances, the rougher variants of rock music are primarily the music of the young male in his teens and early twenties. The majority of fans buying records and attending live shows are under thirty, not only because these forms of music are tougher on the ear, but also because of the way this music is marketed: in specialised magazines, radio shows and underground forms of media, previously through the making and distribution of fanzines, now predominantly via websites and mailing lists. My point is that one needs to search for the alternative rock culture or be shown it, as one is less likely to stumble over underground music on nationwide daytime radio. To feel connected to this kind of music culture, you need to spend a lot of time and energy with it. This is a key element of why the underground is of special interest to teenagers, as they have the time it takes to familiarize themselves with the

culture. Teenagers typically have more hours of leisure time available than do adults, who have responsibilities with work and family.

The aggression found in much rock music, as well as the themes of the lyrics, frequently echoes the sentiments of rage and restlessness felt inherent in the teenager. This is pointed out in a number of works, for example *In Garageland* by Fornäs, Lindberg and Sernhede (1995).

Punk and hard rock are combined primarily by an emphasis on *aggressive male acting-out*. Thus the two styles become attached to a tradition harking back to Elvis Presley and the Rolling Stones. At present, hard rock stands somewhat alone for the continuation of the aggressive element, or rather, one of the currents within hard rock, since it has not escaped being affected by either the synth or masculine role crises. For teenage boys, who still comprise a majority of the hard rock public, it provides the opportunity to act out one side of their egos through identifying themselves with a grotesquely masculine sex role. (Fornäs, Lindberg, Sernhede, 1995: 216)

The exaggeration of the masculine role is part of the appeal, a role to strive towards, and a fantasy of being in power over a crowd, as is the band on stage. But the appeal also lies in the connection felt within the fanbase, a sense of sharing something specific to the group.

Punk and hard rock bands also come across strongly as *groups* and thereby offer appealing dreams of male togetherness and being subsumed in a collective ego – this is particularly true of punk bands. (Fornäs, Lindberg, Sernhede, 1995: 216)

William Tsitsos' article "Rules of Rebellion: Slam dancing, Moshing, and the American Alternative Scene" focuses on what he calls the *ideologies of rebellion* in the pits. These ideologies are mostly related to subcultural groups like drunk punks and straight edgers,²³ which have particular ways of interacting through music, style and behaviour. His work is far more focused on the punk scene than my own is, but his theories on rebellion are very interesting and can be applied here. Tsitsos notes how a vital part of the punk scene is its rebellion against the mainstream, especially among the political punks.²⁴

Political sentiment in punk tends to view the mainstream as the main enemy. This 'mainstream' is symbolised politically by the current social, economic, and political order in America and musically by the existing Top 40 order. With punk music as the

²³ Tsitsos describes Straight Edge as "a personal philosophy which opposes alcohol and drug use, as well as promiscuous sexual activity." (Tsitsos, 199: 403) Drunk punks' philosophy is quite simply getting drunk.

²⁴ Tsitsos separates political and apolitical punk in his essay.

soundtrack for their revolt, political punks aim to break down the existing social, economic, and political order. (Tsitsos, 1999:400.)

It is important for the punks to be understood as separate from the mainstream, and in opposing it also be understood by the mainstream as The Other, separate from the dominant culture. To quote Dick Hebdige:

Whereas the skinheads theorized and fetishized their class position, in order to effect a 'magical' return to an imagined past, the punks dislocated themselves from the parent culture and were positioned instead on the outside: beyond the comprehension of the average (wo)man in the street in a science fiction future. They played up their Otherness, 'happening' on the world as aliens, inscrutables. (Hebdige, 1997: 140)

There's an understanding in the punk environment of being outside the rules of the dominant culture, but at the same time there's a strong sense of internal rules of style and behaviour. With regards to the pit, the same applies. The way of interacting can be seen as rebelling against the way mainstream audiences behave towards music. However, I believe the step from mosh as a reaction to music, to mosh as rebellion, is a long one, and it is not one I am willing to take. The punks whom Tsitsos interviewed made that connection, and described moshing and slamdancing as individual expression. (Tsitsos, 1999:408) But as Tsitsos points out,

Just as drunk punks' explanations of their dancing are structured by this ideology of rebellion, their actions while slamdancing are structured by 'rules' of the pit. The traditional rules of the pit include picking up fallen dancers, moving together in a circular motion in the pit, and bodily motions such as swinging arms and high-stepping legs. These conventions, (...), are also aspects of the dancing which reinforce unity in the pit by promoting ritualised group behaviour and concern for the well-being of other dancers. (Tsitsos, 1999: 408.)

The act of moshing is rioting or rebelling in itself, it arises as an effect of the music, and the existence of this different form of dance is more an indication of musical differences, rather than ideological ones. In punk, ideology and politics are present in the minds of the *creators* of the music, and thus flow into the crowd through the music, but these are, in themselves, not reasons for acting out aggressively in the crowd. To pinpoint moshing as a form of rebellion is to believe the illusion the actors in the genre themselves want to believe. However, although image is everything, it does not follow that the image presented is

anything but a presentation of a story, created to serve the illusion of authenticity and originality towards which the actors of the genre strive.

I believe that, for a number of fans who enter the pit, the *idea* of rebellion is more important than rebelling in itself. Although I do believe that moshing can yield emotional responses, the aggression seen in the pit is better understood as reaction to music which better fits its nature, and is not reflecting the views of the audience towards the rest of their existence. Pit behaviour is part of constructing an alternative identity, opposed to the mainstream, and learning and following the rules of the pit is a factor in that identity being read by others as authentic.

Identity and individuality are discussed in the work of Grotevant and Cooper:

Individuality refers to processes that reflect the distinctiveness of the self. Specifically, individuality is comprised of two dimensions: self-assertion, displaying one's own point of view and taking responsibility for communicating it clearly; and separateness, expression of the distinctiveness of oneself from others. Connectedness involves processes that link the self to others. It is comprised of two dimensions: permeability, expressing responsiveness to the views of others; and mutuality, expressing sensitivity and respect for others' views, especially in taking into account the other's viewpoint when expressing one's own. (Grotevant and Cooper, 1998:5)

This is written with regards to development of personal identity, but it rings true to the way in which individuality is regarded in the subcultural environments. There is a stronger sense of "us" against "them" than personal individuality. Because following the codes within the group is of utmost importance, breaking the code can lead to expulsion from the group, or being seen as inauthentic, a "poser." There is less room for individuality than the individual would like to admit to someone outside the peer group: the standard response tends to be that their cultural group is more open for dissent, which is actually hardly the case. Internal group rules of style, musical taste and behaviour are very strict, especially so opposing the mainstream, but opposition can also be directed towards other groups who are not part of the parent culture.

Pit behaviour can be understood as part of forming group identity in the subcultures along with the music and style, and as such plays into the formation of personal identity, especially

with youth. In the article “Youth Identity and Music,” Tarrant, North and Hargreaves²⁵ discuss Social Identity Theory (SIT), as laid out by Tajfel:

According to SIT, the presence of a social categorization motivates individuals to behave in ways in which secure a positive evaluation of the in-group. This is achieved through a process of social comparison (cf. Festinger, 1954). By comparing the in-group and out group, in-group members should be able to portray their group more positively, or somehow ‘better off’ than the out-group. In doing so, they are able to fulfil the need for positive social identity and self-esteem. (Tarrant, North and Hargreaves, 2002: 137)

They continue to apply this theory to musical identity, showing how SIT applies to the study of adolescence, and the connection between music and the forming of personal and social identity. They lay out in two points how this relationship can be understood:

1. Through the affiliation of their peer groups with certain styles of music, adolescent associate those groups with the meta-information which such affiliation activates;
2. Through intergroup comparison, this affiliation can be exaggerated or diminished according to the value connotation of that meta-information, and in response to social identity needs. (Tarrant et al, 2002: 140).

With hardcore punk and so forth, entering the mosh pit is in itself an affiliation with the underground culture. Correct application of pit rules and behaviour sends a signal to the rest of the group that you have a strong connection to the music, and as such, with the rest of the group. Making the decision to enter the pit also sends a signal that you are strong enough, rough enough to handle the level of aggression in the pit.

7.2. Mosh empowerment – females in the pit

As the rock fanbase is mostly comprised of young males, the implication in this is that the type of group dynamic that is predominant in the pit is of masculine values; it is a form of unified celebration of the exaggerated male ideals, as talked about by Förnås, et al. A space so dominated by males leaves little room for females, and within the rock scene females have been dismissed as groupies, or as having less genuine interest in music than the males. This

²⁵ Published in *Musical Identities*, edited by Raymond MacDonald, David Hargreaves and Dorothy Miell, 2002.

distinction between the genders in the rock environment has been thoroughly laid out in other works, for instance in Mavis Bayton's study (see Bayton, 1998). Bayton's work goes through just about every aspect of being a female rock performer, from becoming interested in music to becoming a professional musician. She describes the constraints laid on females in becoming musicians:

The main ideological constraint is the hegemonic masculinity of rock music-making: the perceived masculinity of the musical discourse itself and that embedded within rock instruments and associated technology. Running in parallel is the ideology of hegemonic femininity, particularly, in its teenage form, which encourages young women to spend a lot of time on their physical presentation of self and the pursuit of the boyfriend. (Bayton, 1998: 187)

In the past, the notion of females entering a rough mosh pit would probably be dismissed as ridiculous, just like females playing electric guitar. But with a larger audience being exposed to mosh-friendly music like grunge and pop punk, the amount of females in the fanbase has risen over time. The alternative rock scene being overcrowded by young men appears to be a thing of the past, and in the indie rock scene the number of females who turn up at concerts is higher than ever. This was noted by local newspaper *Aftenposten* in February 2002, when Irish rockers Ash played at the Rockefeller venue. I found it very telling of the inherent perception of what to expect of a rock concert that the article headlined with the question of "Where the Boys Have Gone."²⁶ This was underlined by a statement from one of the staffmembers working the door, who in the article was quoted as saying that he thought the majority of the girls had turned up because they thought the band members were pretty, labelling Ash as a rock boyband. He was also reported to be snorting during his commentary; that he did not take the female fans seriously as music fans was apparent. The article also linked to statements by a number of key persons in the Oslo underground, who confirmed the reporter's thesis that women were "invading" the scene.²⁷

As I have personally attended concerts in Oslo for a number of years, I have also noticed that the number of females at concerts has risen. However, I wouldn't go so far as to call it an

²⁶ The article referenced to was published both in the print edition of the paper and also on their website, <http://www.oslopuls.no/cityguides/nav/news.jhtml?context=music&id=273335>

²⁷ The headline of the article reads as follows; 'Confirms the female invasion'. <http://www.oslopuls.no/cityguides/nav/news.jhtml?context=music&id=273334>

invasion; that would suggest that females are, on some level, trying to take over the scene, which I do not believe is the case. But it is interesting to see that, even now, the idea of females enjoying music in the same way as men do appears to come as a surprise to some, to the extent that they dismiss the musical interest of females as being based on the looks of the musicians, rather than on the music. I think the article's author's intent was probably just to show that there had been an influx of females in the local scene, but the phrases and descriptions used read as a declaration of the rock scene being a boy's club. It suggested that the girls were trying to make their way into an area where it wasn't logical (to the eyes of the boys referenced, at least) that they belonged.

Norma Coates discuss 'women in rock' in *(R)evolution now*:

(...) popular rock discourse appear to be deeply conflicted about the rise of 'women in rock' and the fact that, at long last, it appears that 'women in rock' may become a permanent category and force in the future of the form. (...) Rock criticism does play a role in positioning rock as a 'serious' medium, but it also plays gatekeeping and taste-making roles. (...) Perhaps the most egregious example of this 'othering' is the moniker 'women in rock.' The designator itself delineates hegemonic space. 'Rock' is separate from 'women'. 'Women' are only related to 'rock' by being allowed 'in'. The 'in' of 'women in rock' has a contingent feel about it, an aura of something that will never be complete, never fully integrated with the whole. (Coates, 1997: 61)

The article mentioned then can be seen as an example of this gatekeeping, in keeping women in their place, by not allowing them to be seen as an integrated part of the community. Are women then doomed to be the outsiders both as musicians and as fans?

Dismissing females in the rock scene is part of confirming rock music as a male domain, is also discussed by Mavis Bayton. When discussing constraints for women in the world of leisure, Bayton notes that public spaces have become male terrain, where objectifying women is part of men's way of proving their own masculinity.

Sexism appears to be an important feature of male bonding, where denigration of girls and women is a crucial ingredient of camaraderie in male circles. (Bayton, 1998:33)

To view women as different and Other is so inherent in the rock scene that the majority do not question that female fans are valued as less serious, a notion which is even stronger when it comes to female musicians.

“(…) it is hardly surprising that girls are excluded, since to have one on drums would undermine rock’s latent function of conferring masculine identity on its participants. It is precisely because of the fragility of adolescent gender identity that so much ‘work’ is invested in patrolling the ideological boundaries (by name-calling, boasting, and so on). Girls fulfil the role of ‘outsiders’” (Bayton, 1998:38)

At the present time, this is still very much the truth, but while I don’t see an invasion, I do see girls claiming the rock world as their own. They are claiming their right to be there on the same level as the boys, without having to *be* boys. It has been difficult for a woman to be taken seriously as a serious rock fan, and especially so in the pit. The pit is – to a certain extent – concerned with extremes, and as such could be seen as an extreme display, not only of musical interest, but also of constructed masculinity. Take the most basic pit rule: “if you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen.” Entering the pit is a sign of strength, mentally and physically. A woman claiming to have that strength on the same level as men can be seen as threatening to some, as experienced by rock fan Katja, whom I’ve interviewed.



Katja is a 20 year-old girl who was born in Russia and now lives in Norway with her family. Blond and just 5’2”, she is far from appearing a threatening young woman, with feminine features and a smile usually in place. You would not suspect by looking at her that she is a very big fan of metal music and loves getting into the pit. The first time she heard about mosh pits was in Italy, where a group of metal fans asked her about the local scene in Oslo. The group was wondering if fans over there would “Podo,” and when she didn’t understand what they meant, they forcefully jumped into each other to demonstrate. Her first moshing experience did not occur during a concert, but on a dance floor. She watched the boys, a head or two taller than she, jumping into each other, and decided that she had to give it a try, so she gathered her strength and jumped into the biggest of them. He looked at her a little funny, as she almost fell to the floor and he barely moved, but as soon as the guys saw that she could hold her own, they did not hold back. She described it as being a bit like the movie *Fight Club*: she would fall and get hurt repeatedly, but greeted every mark with laughter. It was liberating to her, she said, to be treated as an equal in the pit. The guys didn’t worry about hurting her,

because they understood that she had chosen to be there, and that she would get herself out if she couldn't take any more. She woke up the next day in agony, covered in bruises. She said she didn't care, as she'd been able to release all the tension and frustration she had been carrying.

That event occurred in Drøbak, Norway. When she visited the U.S. in the summer of 2004, Katja had a couple of experiences in a pit in Palm Beach, Florida, which were noticeably different. At one concert, one of the guys she was there with instructed her to go to the back with the other girls, while the guys went into the pit. To her surprise the other girls in the group did so without question, standing at the back of the venue with the other girls, politely nodding their heads along with the music. She refused, and stayed closer to the front, but still outside of the pit. She did not see any other females around her, apart from a group of girls (who she referred to as "groupies") at the side closer to the stage. The situation infuriated her to the point where she wanted to jump in to the pit just to make a statement, but she decided it would cause more trouble than it was worth. Despite her not being in the actual pit, the guys she was with frequently shouted back at her to check if she was ok, and repeatedly warned her against entering the pit, saying she could get seriously injured. This did not only annoy her, but she felt it put her in a bad light towards the others there, something she did not appreciate. At another concert, the guy she attended it with assumed the audience would be rougher than she was used to, and acted like her bodyguard, up to the point where she got angry and told him off.

Katja's experience is not uncommon, but also does not match up with what some boys living in the U.S. have told me, which is that females are welcome in the pit as long as they take full responsibility for their own actions. Drew, a 25 year-old male currently living in Los Angeles, was an alternative rock fan who lived near Seattle at the time when grunge was exploding into mainstream success. The first band he saw live was The Violent Femmes, at the Moore Theatre in Seattle in the spring of 1995, and he had been to a number of live shows in clubs and at festivals since. In Drew's experience, there was no real difference between males and females in the pit, with one important distinction: the girls held back less than the males. He said that he would watch out for the ones who dove right into the middle

of the pit, dubbing them as “fucking crazy.” Drew interpreted the behaviour as the girls having had something to prove, but no less so than any male in the pit. Both genders were proving their own toughness, and to Drew the biggest difference between girls and boys in the pit was that ‘girls get groped.’ Other than that, his impression was that girls weren’t treated differently. However, that the gender of the participants in the pit does matter is evident in that girls *do* get groped, and as such the pit has a dynamic that is sexual. This is particularly true as the unwanted groping is difficult to avoid, especially for a female crowdsurfer.

Drew’s experiences in the west coast and Katja’s experiences in the east at first appear very different from each other. I believe the real story lies somewhere between the two, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the two were from different cultures and read the U.S. reactions differently. They also viewed the rock scene through different gazes: what might appear to be equal treatment through the eyes of a male may appear very differently through the eyes of a young female. But their impressions overlapped at some important points: that the majority in the pit is male, and females in the pit appear to be seeking confirmation that they are as strong, if not stronger, than the males.

To take on the exaggerated masculine ideal of the rock scene in the pit can be very empowering to a woman, to claim what has been seen as a predominantly male space as her own, on equal ground with the men, in stark contrast of the feminine gender stereotype in the scene. Women are expected to seek protection from men, not protect themselves. It is undeniable that some males find the idea that women can take care of themselves in a rough environment such as the pit threatening, as Katja learned.



To aid my point I want to end this part with a quote from Judith Halberstam's book *Female Masculinity*, discussing what she describes as "New Masculinities," and how masculinity is seen as off-limits to girls. Her book addresses, among other things, female cross-dressing, and while the pit and the stage on which the Drag Kings present themselves are worlds apart, the ways in which both can be seen as threatening are not dissimilar.

Gender, it seems, is reversible only in one direction, and this must surely have to do with the immense social power that accumulates around masculinity. Masculinity, one must conclude, has been reserved for people with male bodies and has been actively denied to people with female bodies. And this is not to say that all things being equal, all female-bodied people would desire masculinity, only that the protection of masculinity from women who bears examination. (Halberstam, 1998: 269)

It appears, then, to be less troubling for a man that another man takes on feminine traits, as this can be seen as less threatening than a female taking on masculinity. If masculinity is reserved for people with male bodies, it begs the question of what happens when a body understood as male is revealed to be a construction. This brings us to the next part.

7.3. Constructing gender in the pit – a case study

I have made some points about construction of the masculine identity and the pit, and while the majority of my male sources did not make it a point to tell me their gender and how they would feel opposite women, the opposite was true for most of the girls. The girls' Otherness appeared to play a strong part in their descriptions of what made the pit experiences so strong for them, the musical factor set aside. However, one point of view had a rather different



voice from any of the other sources I had been in contact with, who also happened to be the person with the most extreme mosh stories to share.

Aspasia is mentioned in part 3, describing the San Diego punk scene. She was introduced to me as a woman who was active in the local underground scene in the early 80s, her teenage years (she is now 37).

The punk scene was divided into gangs from different areas, and she belonged to the East County punks. It was a fairly tough scene where gang affiliation was mandatory; being on your own was not an option.

What is unusual about Aspasia's case is that she is transsexual, and was born male. She knew from the age of 5 that she was a girl, and said that she was a "sissy" child who got beaten up frequently. She hated being a boy, and felt trapped. The way she described it, when she reached high school her brain split under the pressure to be a boy, and created an alter ego. This persona was highly aggressive and tough, an extreme male who was violent and admired in the punk rock scene. As she said, "I was angry, I was a punk, and the two combined was dangerous."

For Aspasia, punk rock could not have turned up at a better time, and the pit was a place to prove her maleness to herself. She felt like a freak, and the punk scene provided a home for her. "Punk rock was all about being messed up, it was a given, thus I felt at home and accepted," she said. In San Diego, girls did not enter the pit on the same terms as men. It was as if the girls had invisible shields: no one was going to touch a girl. As in Katja's experience, the girls were confined to the side of the stage, or the back. The pit was for the boys, where they could let out their raging hormones without having to consider whether they were hurting anyone. Pit safety was unheard of; Aspasia remembered plenty of nights when blood was spilled. She would frequently get injured herself, and bore the scars like badges of honour.

It was the violence which drew Aspasia to the pit. She wanted to get hurt, because she didn't want to live. In her created male persona she earned a reputation for being dangerous, and was feared. She thought that if she beat up a lot of people, she would end up being a man, but it didn't work. After leaving the scene she spent her twenties feeling numb, working and saving up money, and came out in 2000, becoming *herself* (as she describes it) in September 2001. When she told me about this years later, she said it was as if she had lived two different lives, and it felt like the past was something which had happened to a completely different person. The way she had constructed her male alter ego had been very successful,

and her coming-out made both her family and her friends turn their backs on her. She thought it crushed her old friends, her being a girl. They had looked up to her, and she suspected that – when they learned that the tough boy they had looked up to was someone so different from who they had thought – it was something they were unable to deal with; she thought that it crushed their egos.

Her story was fascinating from a number of perspectives: the contrast between the person she had created for herself and who she in the end admitted to being, and the fact that she was shunned by the people who had been a part of her earlier life. These things fit with Judith Halberstam's assertion that gender is only reversible in one direction. I believe that what was so shocking for her friends was not that she wanted to be a girl, but that she was *already* a girl, and that the girl had in their eyes been more of a man than they, hence the comment about crushing their egos. Because how could a girl create a better performance of an angry young man than they could?

White men derive enormous power from assuming and confirming the nonperformative nature of masculinity. For one thing, if masculinity adheres “naturally” and inevitably to men, then masculinity cannot be impersonated. For another, if the nonperformance is part of what defines white male masculinity, then all performed masculinities stand out as suspect and open to interrogation. (Halberstam, 1998: 235)

What this more extreme example illustrates for me is tied to the notion that, in rock music and the rock scene, the expressions used are “authentic” and “real,” terms thrown about in the scene like dollar bills at a strip club. It seems to me that the actors in the scene not only *want* to believe the illusion the setting presents to them, but there is also a *need* to believe it. With that need comes a desire to not only exaggerate the parts of the culture which are seen as more



rebellious, more masculine, purer – especially in comparison with the mainstream, and also with woman, seen not only in how the musical tastes of females are scrutinized, but also in the manner in which they present themselves in public arenas of music appreciation. The

majority of the sources who contributed to these pages wanted to see themselves as more open and accepting of others, but at the same time they slammed what they felt was incorrect behaviour, incorrect ways of enjoying music. One of the things I heard spoken most often was the sentence “they don’t get it,” in reference to the more mainstream audience.

In this community, pit behaviour is considered part of the correct way to respond to music, even more so in the days of punk than now. For someone to use the scene as a way to construct an illusion of the Authentic Male Fan, and then turn out to be something else entirely, was a striking blow to the people subjected to it. I suspect part of the reason why it was so difficult for Aspasia’s male friends was not that she was a girl, but that her masculine performance was so convincing that they did not suspect it wasn’t real. Along with the mainstream not “getting it,” the idea that girls do get it is laughable to some. This is illustrated by the article referenced earlier, in which a rock band highly influenced by punk was dismissed as a boy band, simply because a large number of their fans were female. Despite the optimism of a lot of my sources, in talking about how the pit is open to everyone who wants to participate, I do believe that the gender rift in the pit is still as strong as in the rest of the alternative music scene.

As an example of this, I have a quote from *In Garageland* which illustrates my point beautifully.

(...) by playing rock, [boys] are allowed to display feelings of weakness, tenderness, intimacy, sorrow and frustration which would otherwise be stifled. Girls seem to find other legitimate outlets for such feelings. (Fornäs, Lindberg, Sernhede, 1995:253)

This quote is now ten years old, but despite recent declarations of female invasions, and my female sources saying they feel empowered and treated like equals in the pit, the fact remains that the scene is formed by a masculine mentality which is so strong it is not expected or even desired by anyone to change. More often than not, the pit is the playground of boys, and the girls in it are understood to be either visiting briefly, or as different from the “ordinary” girl. If rock music is really an arena in which boys are allowed to let out feelings otherwise deemed inappropriate for them to display, it is somewhat understandable that a desire to keep girls out should arise, even more so with one masquerading as a boy. To quote Judith Butler:

The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between “feminine” and “masculine,” where these are understood as expressive attributes of “male” and “female”. The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “Identities” cannot “exist” – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender. (Butler, 1990: 23-24)



The rock world, like the rest of the world, is shaped by its heterosexist practices of desire: the strong heterosexual male rules the scene above the weaker participants and the weaker sex; his strength is confirmed by the lack of it in others. The practice of keeping females in their place is so inherent in the scene that it can come across as natural to its members, male and female alike. But this practice is challenged not only by female musicians, but also by the females who refuse to stay at the side or near the back, choosing instead to partake in the action and in the connectedness on equal terms with men; they deny men’s protection because such protection is not something they feel that they need.

8. Conclusion

In the beginning pages of this paper I asked: why do people mosh? In the pages that followed I explained how a mosh pit functions, how people respond to the pit, how they move in the pit, and how they make sense of themselves through the pit. However, the simple answer to the question is: people mosh because of their love of the music. Moshing is being in a crowd of people listening to a band perform, and being pulled into the music with such strength that one cannot stay still: one has to move, become part of the crowd, and let oneself be swept away by the wave that goes through the crowd. It’s an environment which embraces the concept of having no control, while at the same time is controlling. The pit controls the performance, and the other fans. It does the first by being an exclamation of desire and love towards the band, who then are affected by it in turn. It accomplishes the latter through the

statement made by being in the pit: this is just for the toughest and most dedicated of fans. The pit draws a line between the ones who, by the participants' standards, have what it takes, and the others, who don't. Generally, girls are seen as a uniform group of people who do not have the physical or mental strength that the pit requires. Gender roles in the rock environment are underlined by the violent nature of the pit, as the pit is frequently seen as a playground for young, adrenaline-fuelled men.

The ways in which a crowd moves have changed significantly over the years: as music has evolved, so have the crowds. I believe the mentality of the crowd is changing still, and while the separation between male and female fans is still evident, an increasing number of female fans are refusing to stay in the space where they were once assigned. They are instead partaking on equal terms with the male fans, entering the pit to break up the "sausage party," as a female moshers described it.

It is the sense of connectedness felt in the pit which draws people in, a sense of the music taking control of you, pushing your body to move. It's a connection that male and female fans share, a joy of having the time of your life, and pushing your limits:

And then the lead singer screams: **"Jump!"**



9. Appendix

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Visual Text

DVD:

Rage Against The Machine - Live At The Olympic Auditorium

Release Information:

Studio: Sony Music Video

DVD Release Date: December 8, 2003

Websites

Ankeny, Jason

"Rage Against The Machine Biography"

<http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=11:wsu36j4h71q0~T1>

Aftenposten (Øyvind Holen)

"Jenter på rocker'n"

<http://www.oslopuls.no/cityguides/nav/news.jhtml?context=music&id=273335>

Aftenposten (Author not named)

"Bekrefter jenteinvasjonen"

<http://www.oslopuls.no/cityguides/nav/news.jhtml?context=music&id=273334>

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Allmusic guide <http://www.allmusic.com>

Hyperreal - the online raver community: <http://hyperreal.org>

Merriam-Webster Online: <http://www.m-w.com/>

Wikipedia - the free encyclopedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/>

Internet research undertaken between 18th of March and 10th of June, 2004

Survey text:

Research on the rock audience

I am a student of music at the University of Oslo, and for my thesis I am doing research on moshing, stagediving and crowdsurfing. As personal experiences are very important, I am collecting stories and descriptions from fans, and to better my understanding I need as many different replies as possible. I would be very pleased if you would take a few minutes and fill in this form. Write as much or as little as you want. If you are against moshing, I would also like to hear your views. Questions? Comments? Feel free to send me an email.

Thank you for your time.

Tori Johanne Lau

1. How many concerts have you been to?
2. Do you generally go to gigs with seating or standing?
3. Have you ever....

Been in a mosh pit

Stagedived

Crowdsurfed

Been seized by stage security

If you didn't check either, please skip question 4 to 7

4. Why do you mosh?
5. How does moshing make you feel? Also, how do you feel after you've been in a mosh pit?
6. What's the best mosh experience you've ever had?
7. Have you ever gotten injured from moshing or stagediving? If yes, please describe. If no, have you ever feared you would be seriously damaged?
8. What's the worst mosh experience you've ever had? (Doesn't have to be involving you, it can be something you saw happen to someone else)
9. How do you feel about venues that ban moshing? Is it a good or bad thing? Why?
10. What do you think can be done to prevent people from getting hurt in the mosh pits?
11. Would it be ok if I contacted you via email if I have any further questions?

Thank you for your time.

Sample replies (5)

may-helen flatstrand (xenababylon@hotmail.com)

1. 40+
2. Standing
3. been in a moshpit
4. Because it's fun. Going to a concert is a experience that involves all of you, not only the ears. It often isn't natural to stand still.
Also quite many of the concerts i go to is very aggressive music, and moshing is a great katharsis for our natural aggression. It goes something like this: Acting out behaviour that to a certain degree is aggressive, but with happiness and a positive feeling for the people around, and thus with no intention of hurting anyone.
...And what a great alternative to fucking aerobic!
5. Extremely happy. I get a feeling of unity with the people around me. Sometimes I loose myself to the crowd and the music and reach an altered state of consciousness.
Afterwards i generally feel excited, happy and exhausted.

6. Hard to choose...so many... I guess the best was at a Bad Religion gig in '98. It was near the ending of the concert, everyone in the crowd was exhausted, and the band were playing more slower songs. The mood was rather calm. Then suddenly we heard the intro of "Along the Way", an old favourite for many Bad Religion fans. It felt like there was an electrical surge going through the room. Everyone was running forward and started to pogo like crazy. The feeling was truly magical, I've seldom felt so much alive as i did then.

7. Cuts and bruises doesn't count, so no.

I was really scared at a Bob Hund concert in Roskilde. I fell down, but noone was helping me. I tried to get up myself, but there was just too many people and too much pressure. I was just lying there, struggling to get up and trying to avoid being too much trampled on. When the song was finished, the crowd was loosening up a bit, and I was able to scramble to my feet (Noone was helping me now either).

8. The obvious answer here would be Pearl Jam, Roskilde 2000. On the other hand, I had no idea what was going on until afterwards, even though I was standing just about 10 meters away from where people was killed

9. To ban moshing would ruin much of the fun of going to concerts, and for no reason. The only place there would be a point to such a ban is the really big concerts where it is impossible to pull through anyway.

10. The custom in moshpits is to be aware if someone falls or get injured, and help. You may push the guy next to you, and jump on his toes, but if he falls down, you grab him and pull him up. If necessary, you make the people around you aware of the situation.

Usually this isn't a problem, but in a few cases too many in the audience is too inexperienced in mosh-behaviour, and too stupid to realize that the basic rule of helping people in trouble applies in moshpits too. Just putting up signs reminding them would help alot.

11. yes

Killstr8s@aol.com (Killstr8s@aol.com)

4. It's a form of dance. If the music is good, i want to dance.

5. How it makes me feel depends on the show, ex who is playing and the attitude of the people in attendance. I don't usually dance at big concert type events, but i usually do at DIY shows. It also depends on the gender ratio of the people there, and of that, the gender ratio of the people in the pit. There are times when I feel compelled to dance more because I want to break up the sausage party (ie when i see there are few or no females in the pit) than because of the music itself. Those times, "moshing" (I hate calling it that. When I think of moshing i think of jock pits where people just shove each other, not of hardcore or punk pits where people are actually dancing) makes me feel like some sort of amazon, or at least tougher than the majority of females in attendance (coatracks!). When I dance because I feel motivated by the music, it just feels good. If I feel motivated to dance but don't actually do it due to dominance of the pit by tough-guy hardcore dancers doing kickboxing moves or something it makes me feel like I've been unable to participate fully in the show. Dancing is an important part of punk shows in that it breaks down the barrier between performer and spectator (take pile on sing alongs for example).

6. I think I've had too many to answer that, and again, i hate calling it moshing. Seeing Vitamin X play in a garage was really cool, I danced a lot. It helped that it was a small show and I knew most of the people there.

7. I've been hit in the face while circle pitting many times. Only once was it hard enough to make my nose bleed, and the person who hit me was my housemate. He felt really bad about it, but we both agreed that these things happen.

There was another time when i was in front of the stage at a big Gwar show. There were so many people that were all trying to get up front at once that I was getting pretty squished, and then some strange guy behind me was putting his arms around my head. I freaked out and bit him. He yelled at me for biting him so I yelled at him for holding onto my head. Then i got Gwar-blood in my eye and it took a really long time to get out of the "pit" if it could even be called that since everyone was trying to rush the stage.

There have been many times when I've witnessed tough-guy hardcore boys do ninja crap, hurling themselves into the people surrounding the pit, hurting them. I've gotten bruises that way at a lot of shows.

there are two reasons why I don't stagedive or crowdsurf. The first is that I really hate getting kicked in the head by people who do, so much in fact, that when people crowdsurf over me I either get out of the way and hope they fall or I punch them in uncomfortable places while they're above me and pretty defenseless. The second is that the idea of a bunch of mostly male strangers' hands all over my body is not my idea of fun.

8. Getting my tits grabbed by stupid boys. It's happened at least twice. Both times it was by boys who were travelling through here and not actually part of the local scene (thus not as easy to hold accountable, at least long term - all you can do then is confront them right then and maybe beat them up).

9. It's bad. People should be allowed to dance. It sucks when you or your friends get thrown out of a show because the bouncers just don;t understand the way you dance. At the same time there needs to be an element of self-policing wherein people do not go in the pit to hurt each other, people help each other out if someone falls, etc.

10. see above.

Tamera O. (Tamathy06@msn.com)

Q1=20-40

Q2=Standing

Q3a=in moshpit

checkbox=checkbox

Q4=I mosh because it makes me feel connected with the music, I is the whole experience that makes the show great for me. I love being one with the crowd and going crazy, enjoying the

moment and getting into the music.

Q5=Moshing makes me feel one with the crowd, I feel connected with the music and it intensifies the whole experience for me. After being in a moshpit I tend to be very sore and usually have a lot of bruises the next day. You can get pretty beat up but I think it's worth it.

Q6=I was front and center at a Story of the Year show a few months ago at a small club, and the whole crowd was amazing and we just moved together and jumped and screamed and sang along to every word. The band really got into it and made a lot of contact with us, it was a really amazing show and I don't think I have ever had so much fun at a concert.

Q7=I have fainted once, but that was because I was sick and not moshpit related at all. But I almost fainted at the last show I went to from being dehydrated and extremely overheated and the pressure of the crowd. But I was pulled out and alright. At that same show a crowd surfer fell and as she did she grabbed the back of my neck and sunk her nails into it and caused me to bleed. My best friend got her nose slammed into the barricade at that show, she was spitting blood for hours. I have gotten knocked to the floor several times by crowd surfers, and been hurt by them kicking me in the head.

Q8=I was at an outdoor festival last year and the crowd was crazy, Billy Talent was playing and for reasons that I do not know some girl fainted up front and was getting crushed. Apparently the band saw and stopped the set to yell for meds, but they took a very long time for some reason. The band continued to wait and ended up cutting their set by over ten minutes because of it. I think the girl was alright in the end, she just got hurt a lot. I know I heard someone say she was bleeding quite a bit.

Q9=I think it's pretty lame when venues do that, I don't see how they could control the entire crowd anyway. I can't imagine going to shows and the crowd just standing still and singing along quietly. I think moshing is a big part of shows for a lot of people, if you know you cannot handle it then watch from the back.

Q10=I think you just have to know your limits, if you cannot handle it then get out. Watch the people around you, and everyone should try and help those around them if someone gets hurt or is in danger. I think the best advice is if you don't think you can handle it, don't go in. And if you are in, just be careful.

email=Yes

Katie Callahan (katiecal182@msn.com)

Q1=1-20

Q2=Standing

Q3a=in moshpit

Q3c=crowdsurfed

Q4=It's a release for me.

I'm in an environment where I can forget my responsibilities and go crazy basically. I let go of everything except the music and I just go off to the song.

Q5=Moshing is basically stress relief for me. I've been listening to a bands music, I sing it, I feel it, it gets stuck in my head, I take it to heart and when it's played live I feel like I get lost in it. When I mosh

it's like I'm letting out all of the passion I feel for the song or the band. It's all there in front of me so I just let myself go. I feel like I'm in another world where it's just me throwing myself around to the music. After I've been in a moshpit I get this euphoric feeling for a while after, but a few hours later I tend to get sore. I feel kind of battered, but I know that it was worth it. I'm always left wanting more.

Q6=My best experience was at a Brand New show. They are my favorite band and their songs have added a lot of meaning to my life. During one particular song that hits me pretty hard I totally went off. At first I was crying because of the songs content and then I just got this wave of passion. I needed to get all of my feelings out so I started moshing like crazy. I was a mess of tears and sweat, anger, love, sadness and I just let everything go. It was amazing to be able to feel the song and be part of the crowd like that.

Q7=No, I've had some pretty bad bruises and what not, but nothing serious. I always enter a pit with caution fearing that I'll get hurt or that my friends will get hurt, but I usually steer clear of anything that looks like it may be too brutal since I'm on the smaller side. I was very scared once when standing against the barricade because my head almost got smashed against it as a crowd surfer came over me.

Q8=The worst moshing experience I've ever had was watching my little sister get sucked into a brutal circle pit and having to fight to get her out. We were both very young and small at the time and it was her first time in a mosh pit. I was constantly pulling her out from underneath large crowdsurfers and making sure that she didn't get banged up too much. Needless to say I didn't do too much moshing that night.

Q9=I think that it really depends on the show. If a show will most likely draw a younger, smaller crowd banning moshing (and especially crowdsurfing) is a good idea. It's stupid for the venue to have to deal with a slew of lawsuits because precious 12 year olds got bruised in the pit. But banning moshing at an older or more "hardcore" show is ridiculous. People at these shows should know what they're getting themselves into.

Q10=The most important thing is to look out for other people. Pick people up when they fall down, you wouldn't want the people around you to watch while you got trampled! Also take heed of who is around you. If you want to get a pit going or go up crowdsurfing don't do it while you're surrounded by smaller people. I think that it's also important for bands to mention the whole "unity" thing. People are likely to listen when the band tells them to take care of the people around them or not to step on their friends. Some bands even ask if everyone is alright. Even though you're in a moshpit, you should be courteous and use common sense.

email=Yes

Shaun Green (shanu@heavierthanstars.co.uk)

1. 40+
2. Standing
3. check 'been in a moshpit', 'crowdsurfed', and 'been seized by...'
4. To me a gig or show is not a one-way experience, and the idea of an entire crowd passively sitting and listening does not appeal at all. Moshing, like dancing, is a form of reaction to the music. With some types of music I like to dance, with others I like to mosh.
5. It burns off energy, produces an adrenaline rush... it's fun and feels good. You get the sort of glow and warmth that you feel after any sort of physical exertion, be it sport, sex or moshing.
6. The most recent and fun was about half a dozen of us moshing / dancing at a small Leatherface gig. That was the first time I'd acted like that at a gig in a long time, and it was great fun. To be honest, though, I couldn't point at a "best experience".
7. I don't think so; a few bruises or sore muscles the next day. I'm always worried about getting injured or badly hurt, but it's not that common... and besides, most people who mosh at gigs are fairly responsible about it. Most of us aren't out to really hurt anyone else (although there are always some).
8. I've never *seen* anything that bad happen, but I've heard about stuff like security starting fights with kids who're crowdsurfing or stagediving against venue rules, and shit like that.
9. It will depend on what sort of gigs they're putting on. If it's slow, mellow, indie rock, or something - who cares, that sort of music you do not mosh to. But if a venue bans moshing and puts on hardcore or metal bands... who are they kidding? People are going to mosh; we are not a passive herd.
10. People could take more responsibility for those around them when moshing. Bands could pay closer attention to the pit and make sure that no-one is getting messed up. Generally, this is usually the case anyway!
11. Yes